

Reading Society of Model
Engineers
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The Prospectus

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Free to members



A Christmas Special as seen on the Bluebell Railway on
26 December 1963. Photo John Billard

**DAWSON'S DIARY
A SEASONAL MESSAGE
HRH VERSUS LANDFILL
A CHRISTMAS STORY
BRANCH LINE FUNDAMENTALISTS**

DAWSON'S DIARY

kept by the President

The first of November was somewhat different for the members. It was the first time for a birthday party to be held on a working Wednesday. This event was a Mexican The Med party to wear sombreros and ponchos a good number of the visitors came wearing this attire also members of the club joined in as well. Both tracks were in use with most locos being steam were run. This time the club Baldwin was in use on the grounds level as well.. The visitors said that they had a good time.

While this was going on the block paving was being laid in the area of the loco lift. Also Pete Culham and Alf Cosworth have been repainting the trollies and fixing new logos on the valences, also the seats have been recovered.

PLEASE TRY TO TAKE CARE NOT TO DAMAGE THE SEATS WHEN USING STEAM LOCOMOTIVES. PLEASE USE METAL COAL BOXES NOT PLASTIC ONES FOR THE POKERS ETC. MAKE SURE THAT YOU HAVE A SPARK ARRESTOR OF SOME SORT IN USE ALL THE TIME!

Public running for November was a busy one for this time of year. The car park was full for most of the day. With plenty of support from the members and a good turn out of locomotives made it good for the RSME. We owe Liz a big thanks for coping all day serving teas to the public and members at the same time. Well done everyone for pulling together.

As mentioned above the ground around the loco lift had much more work by Nigel's team. They have dug out the grass ready to put in a concrete base on the next working day, a lot of effort was put in by those members before it got too dark on that day.

PONDERINGS

by 61249

I tried to run a railway Part 4 - Running It

One of the delights of our organisation as a TOC was the focus that it gave us on providing customer service. Firstly, that was clearly our role, not planning for the whole of Network South East, not looking after a 150 year old infrastructure, just running trains and getting bums on seats.

Secondly, in the privatised railway that was about to arrive, we had all the revenue risk, so we had a huge incentive to look after customers so well that they never thought of reaching London any other way. It was good business, and we all lived by our success in attracting business and collecting fares. Having experienced the power of these two things together, I am convinced that they should be the norm for railways, and government bodies taking over some or all of the customer facing risks leads to the customer becoming second fiddle, when they should be King.

We had a number of ways of communicating with our customers, some of whom knew as much about the railway, and certainly as much about this morning's disruption, as we did. Others did not seem to know a lot. I was deputed to go to St Albans to send off a lady who was retiring and had commuted for 42 years. We were warned by her sister and we turned up in strength with flowers, and an upgrade. Time for surprise pictures on the platform for the local papers, and as we ushered her on to her final work trip, she let it be known that she thought we all worked for Railtrack! Since Thameslink was the most aggressively branded of all the railways at the time, being the only one with our battleship grey livery, this was a bit of a disappointment, to say the least.

On the livery, my predecessor had heard of the "battleship" label that the staff gave the trains, and explicitly forbade its use. This, however, produced all sorts of innovation in expression around semi-official documents, all done in good rebellious humour. "Bow door leaking" and "Driver's porthole stuck" were two I remember from repair books, reminding me that bosses can control some things, but not everything.

One more "running" incident comes to mind, as it also carried a reminder of the importance of detail, and the limits of managerial power in a system where the folk who drive the trains, and control the signals really have sway. The occasion was the visit of Her Majesty to a civic event in Bedford. Liaison elsewhere made arrangements for her to travel by a Sheffield bound HST with a special stop at Bedford using the up slow platform nearest to the station exit. There I would be at the head of a line of folk to meet her, an event that I was looking forward to immensely. One small detail was remembered as we looked over the plans, which was that this platform was the one by the Cricklewood/Stewartby "Rubbish" train. This was containers full of landfill waste destined for old brick quarries. To spotters, it was distinctive because of its green containers, but if you got close to it the only thing you would remember is the smell. It often reversed at Bedford around 11.00, and HM was booked to arrive just about then. Believe me, the waft would linger and would not provide the ambience that either the Queen, or the line of welcoming Mayors and Lord Lieutenants would appreciate. Bedford may seem to lack sex appeal without that!

The plan was clear, and communicated to Railtrack via our excellent relationship in the West Hampstead control office, where Thameslink had a person sitting alongside the signallers. The rubbish train was to be held outside Bedford on the slow line to allow the Queen to sweep past into the platform. More important to delay the rubbish than adversely impact HM view of Bedford!

Real life got in the way, as usual, and the rubbish arrives at Bedford not on the slow line, but the fast, a mere 15 mins in front of the special HST. Apparently it was a little bit early being loaded and the man at West Hampstead with the ability to select the route thought that by giving it a run down the main line it would be well out of the way by 11.00. Signallers, of course, cannot smell trains. So into the platform it rolled in all its glory just as the dignitaries started

to assemble. Someone had the presence of mind to take a couple of cups of tea to the loco crew to make sure that they did not visit the buffet as part of their running – round procedure. Thankfully all the couplings, brakes points, and reversers worked and it was soon reversed, but for those with sensitive noses, something did linger until HM arrived and the normal HST smells of Paxman exhaust and braking heat took over. Even Prince Philip did not mention the pong, so I guess we got away with it. The Queen said it was a very nice train she came on – was it one of mine? I had to confess that our stopping service 319s were not considered suitable for HM, but that we would forgive her using the opposition’s train. She smiled and moved on, possibly with lingering doubts about the value of competition on the same tracks, but too polite to say so.

It was difficult for us in Thameslink to regard the St Pancras HSTs as anything but the opposition as opposed to complimentary services, when one additional stop by an HST in the up direction in the morning peak took away over £250k of our hard won revenue. This was done not by an accurate count of passengers, or ticket sales detail, but through the revenue allocation system which worked on algorithms developed by the BR Operational Research department. These computed the impact of running times and other service attractiveness features. We were stunned when the Inter-City operator inserted one such stop, and were close to challenging the move until I stood on the footbridge at the appointed hour and watched what happened. Floods of folk who would normally get our 319 rushing over to get the preferable comfort and speed that was available. It seemed immediately that £250k might be an underestimate if we got into the debate, so we took it on the chin. We did have a couple of express services in the morning, and the journey time of a fast 319 on the main line with just one stop at Luton was comparable to HST timings. But the train ambience was not, and it clearly made a big difference to our customers. Oh, the joys of multi-available ticketing!

Enough about running the railway, we also tried to improve it, were asked to sell the Franchise, and thought we would try to buy it. So the next article will be about how to improve the railway, and how we did.



A CHRISTMAS JOURNEY by John Spokes

Although it had never been explicitly said, I had deduced I was the main beneficiary of my Aunt Maude's estate. Thus the reason for my annual pilgrimage to York and of course the opportunity to participate in an agreeable if unremarkable Christmas.



Kings Cross was unexpectedly quiet for the Season. The darkness had been a good hour in the making and probably many travellers had selected earlier departures. I trusted a porter to stow my valise in the luggage van and through the tendering of a sizeable tip secured also the provision of a large foot-warmer and a travel rug, both elegantly displaying the initials of the Great Northern Railway. I was no expert in these things, but through my older cousin Preston had gained some knowledge of the workings of the modern railway. Preston had been a keen student of the Railway Mania and the subsequent years, from the perspectives of general interest and, more importantly, financial gain.

“Your train will probably be pulled by one of the newish Stirling eight-foot singles”, he had boyishly remarked during our meeting to exchange Christmas cards.

On such a cold winter’s evening and with a little snow in the air I quickly overcame my enthusiasm to confirm this conjecture and settled as the sole occupier into my first-class compartment. So, in the shortening days of 1876, I started to the north-country to savour Yuletide fare and to reinforce the security of my modest fortune.

The start from Kings Cross was accompanied by much slipping of the engine and the consequential staccato roar of wasted steam, but once we had cleared the two tunnels our progress achieved a more stable rhythm and the punctuations of the wheels on the track joints induced in me a tendency to doze. I could not say where on my journey, but I was reasonably certain we had not reached Peterborough, I momentarily roused and half-noticed a figure by the far door of the compartment. In my state of half-awakenedness I instinctively and, in hindsight, stupidly reached to my waistcoat for my ticket. It was a man; of that, no doubt. Tall and lean, his back to me and his figure bowed so that through cupped hands, pressed against the door window glass, he peered into the featureless night racing past. Not a gentleman, I should add. His over-apparel was a long, brown and aged check cloak which extended almost to his thick-soled boots. He turned rapidly and now bolt upright fixed his stare on the opposite door window as if trying to recollect some fact or detail. He wore no hat and his long, grey beard matched his unkempt hair to an extent that it was difficult to see where the one ended and the other began.

It was possible that the percussive departure from Kings Cross had been part of a dream and my fellow passenger had boarded unnoticed by me in my slumber. On the seat in the corner diagonally opposite to mine was a thin black folder and a partly folded newspaper. His fixed gaze broke and he twisted his body slightly before slumping, without any control, into this seat, the black folder propelled to the carriage floor and the newspaper crumpled under the momentum of his descending weight.

For the first time he looked my way. *“Do you think the railways of today are safe?”*, he asked of me in a quiet, but somewhat hurried voice.

I was not minded to share with someone to whom I had not been formally introduced any anxieties I might have about travelling by train. In truth I had never given the subject any consideration and cousin Preston had never offered any insights. No matter, before I could formulate an inoffensive reply he continued.

“Trains travel at such speeds these days and in the recent past there have been a number of serious disasters. Two in this part of the country. Just over a year since there was a head-on collision near Norwich involving an engine not unlike the one currently drawing us north and only last January there was a terrible accident in snow. At Abbots Ripton, I believe. I observed that we passed by the place not a long while back”. A pause and then a nervous glance through his

adjacent window. *“An express locomotive identical to ours.”*, he mumbled without turning his head.

A second pause, longer perhaps, then he looked downwards to the faint outline of the adjacent track reflected in the glow of carriage gas-lights. A London-bound train thundered past, shaking the door window in its support, the flashing light from its carriage windows opening to view his much-lined visage through the gossamer beard. This sudden intrusion into his short interlude of rail-gazing considerably unsettled my fellow traveller and he rose slightly, extracted the crumpled broadsheet and with no particular conviction began to scrutinise its pages. I decided that my most appropriate tactic should be one of being ignorant towards his remarks and I feigned a relapse into sleep.

“Then of course there was the calamity just north of Oxford. Christmas Eve. Exactly two years ago. Thirty-four killed and sixty-seven injured.....caused I read by a small piece of broken wheel which in turn was due to the cold. My Aunt Maude worries about my situation and is constantly reminding me that I should forego the train and use one of the few horse-drawn coaches that she believes still ply the Great North Road”.

‘His’ Aunt Maude! Could such a woman still be alive and, if so, to what great age? I was becoming peeved now. Was my much anticipated journey to York to be corrupted by the detailed annals of English railway misfortunes? I could bear this depression of my spirits no longer and, opening my eyes abruptly, raised my body upright on my seat. The man sensed my irritation and, as if to deflect my objection, politely asked if I would retrieve for him the black folder that had fallen on the floor. Perhaps this gesture would bring a not unwanted end to his ramblings. I bent down to grasp the thin card cover and suddenly felt the floor lurch upwards and by reaction I fell sideways. Violent oscillations shook the carriage, accompanied by the noise of a great tempest. A resistance slowly drew the train to a halt and in the relative silence the gas lights illuminated small flurries of snow that glided down and into the shattered carriage windows. I looked to replace myself in my seat in an attempt to recover my senses when I saw, through the carriage side and into the back of that very seat, a length of bent rail that would have surely pinned me like a stricken butterfly.

Had my nervous companion been so fortunate? I turned and in his spot the carriage floor was gone, ripped open as by some giant hand which had taken him, and, as I subsequently discovered, his newspaper and black folder too.

ooOo ooo

A CHRISTMAS MESSAGE

from Les Dawson

There has been plenty of work carried out around our club site at this time of year. Our Parks and Gardens gang have been very busy keeping up with the falling leaves that have to be moved from the track etc. The November winds have done their job once again.

These members do a grand job throughout the year. The grass areas have looked very nice all the time in 2017. A big thank you to George Saffrey, Chas Benham, Mike Furness and all the members who help when needed. Many of the public have said how well kept our site is when they come for a trip on our trains.

Over the past year there have been many projects carried out to improve our club site for our benefit. The trustees have really made a big improvement in the running of the RSME. It shows what can be achieved if we all pull together, with a steady increase of members as well makes it worthwhile.

On behalf of the trustees and I once again a very big thank you and I wish all the members a very Merry Christmas and all the best for the New Year!

WOLVERTON PUG

The Soho Sinner

After I left Waterman Railways Charter Business (WR) I still did some work for Bernard Staite who was still with WR. I acted as train manager on a number of charters, which included the fateful VIP Pullman for Martel to the Grand National on the occasion the race was cancelled due to a bomb scare among others referred to in past Prospectii.

I once did a VIP trip with a wedding party to Stratford on Avon where the cake cutting ceremony was performed on the platform at Stratford.

On 15th July 1995 I did a VIP dining train from Kings Cross to Edinburgh for the Tall Ships Race. The only points of note on that trip consisted of a cremated buzzard at Craigentiny Train Maintenance depot which had short circuited the overhead wires with its wingspan and the return train being heavily delayed due to signals out of order north of Berwick and no mobile 'phone signal. I had to disembark from the front of the leading vehicle to the ballast, studiously watching that the signal remained at red whilst I climbed up to the driver's cab on the class 90 to find out what the problem was on his GSM cab radio! We arrived at Kings Cross at 6 minutes past midnight and I had to book into the IBIS hotel as it was too late to get home from Paddington.

By January 1996 I had settled in to my property role at Freightliner and we were 'full on' completing documentation to meet the Government's requirement to sell the business that April. Bernard asked me to be train manager on a charter train called the Soho Sinner. It was being marketed by Hertfordshire Railtours and was to visit various non-passenger locations in the West Midlands including the Lawley Street Freightliner Terminal in Birmingham. I readily agreed as this

would be of interest to me seeing how the terminal would deal with an 11 coach train of Mark 1 carriages hauled by two class 31/4s belonging to Transrail which were in "Main Line" livery matching the InterCity "Raspberry Ripple" livery of the carriages. There was a buffet car, 8 tourist open seconds, one compartment first and a brake composite. The date was Saturday 20th January and the train was starting from Paddington at 08.03.

I duly got my wife Anne to run me to Reading station in time to catch the 06.30 stopper to Paddington. This would give me time to check through the train to see everything was in order before the punters turned up. The stock arrived eleven minutes early at 07+19.

On checking the train I found the roof tanks were dripping water through the ceilings in the vestibules of two vehicles. These are the water tanks for the toilets and are notorious for leaks in Mk 1 carriages as the tanks are made of mild steel and the joints are all welded, which begin to weep with age (don't we all!). Unfortunately there was little I could do about this, not having a portable welding kit with me! In another standard open the lights were not working. However by using my BR1 key to turn them on-off-on they remained working. Such are the vagaries of aging mark 1 coaches.

The catering firm being employed by Hertfordshire Railtours were called Platelayers, a nice piece of double meaning. As there was only a buffet service the catering vehicle was a miniature buffet (RMB), which could only provide light snacks. However to provide the volume of hot water for the tea urns for the trolley they had a small portable generator which was placed on the platform at the longer station stops and fired up. I was a little uneasy regarding this arrangement. Railtrack owned all the stations and except for the larger ones they were leased to the relevant Train Operating Companies (TOCs), in this case Great Western, Central Trains and Virgin West Coast. Not being aware of any prior agreement for this between Waterman Railways and the TOCs I was wary of any officious station staff, but we had no problem. That certainly would not be the case now.

The train ran without incident and more or less to time to Birmingham Snow Hill via Leamington and Dorridge. At Snow Hill Railfreight Distribution class 47 no 47226 was attached to the rear. We then continued forward via Smethwick, Rowley Regis and Old Hill to Stourbridge Jn. where we reversed. With the class 47 now leading we returned via Old Hill and Smethwick turning left at Soho and Perry Bar. We continued north through Bescot and Bushbury, avoiding Wolverhampton and on to Stafford.

On arriving at Stafford the train crept round the back of the station on the Down Goods line to gain access to the Universal Grinding Wheel Branch. Otherwise known as the Salop Branch, the former London and North Western Railway route to Wellington and Shrewsbury. But now only a siding serving the Universal Grinding Wheel Company though more or less out of use. Bagnalls the locomotive builders had a siding into their works off this branch. Bagnalls are long gone.

The class 47 crept slowly along the branch towards the buffer stop. While this was happening I couldn't help noticing that an increasing number of passengers were making their way hurriedly towards the front. The volume of people continued to increase. Eventually I asked one of the organisers what was going on. He informed me that these people were a party from the Branch Line Society. If you are a Branch Line Society fundamentalist the requirements are that you have to actually stand as far as possible forward in the leading vehicle to be able to count, (the word for which is 'scratch'), all the track on the branch as having been traversed, with the exception of course, of the locomotive and the leading vehicle corridor bellows outside the locked leading door!

This excitement over the two class 31s then began hauling the train back off the branch. After a brief stop in Stafford station we returned towards Penkridge. Approaching Wolverhampton we swung right onto Oxley chord which takes you round towards Shrewsbury. The reason for this was to run into the reception lines for Oxley Carriage Maintenance Depot. This cord line was only built in 1983 for coal trains en route to Ironbridge Power Station, which is now closed of course.

However the over enthusiastic signalman at Oxley pulled off all the dummies and we continued into the carriage sidings as far as number 6 road. The Branch Line Society fundamentalists went bonkers, all trying to wedge into the leading vestibule! After 12 minutes or we set off back and through Wolverhampton and via Smethwick, Soho, Perry Bar and Aston to Birmingham New Street from the east, reversing here we set off on the Derby Line and onto the Goods Line at Saltley. This enabled the train to reverse into Lawley Street Freightliner Terminal. I seem to recall a fair amount of indemnification paperwork was required to protect Freightliner (1995) Ltd from any risk associated with bringing passengers and indeed other people's rolling stock and locomotives into a freight facility. This whole manoeuvre worked perfectly and the train arrived 17 mins early and departed 19 mins early. The extra time was used up on Lawley Street Reception Road awaiting our path back to Birmingham New Street.

At New Street the class 47 was detached and the train returned to the Western Region via Tyseley, Leamington and Banbury arriving at Paddington at 19.49 one minute early.

All in all an excellent trip.



Right and below

31420+31423
Jerome K. Jerome.



All photos WP

Birmingham Landor St.
FLT. Saltley Panel Signalbox
on the right.



Bushbury Viaduct, curving round
to Oxley CS-2



DIARY

December 2017

Sunday	3rd	Public running	13.30
Tuesday	5th	00 Gauge	
Saturday	9th	Club running	11.30 onwards
Sunday	10th	Birthday party	11.00– 13.30
Monday	11th	Trustees meeting	19.30
Wednesday	13th	Christmas lunch	
Saturday	16th	Santa Specials	
Sunday	17th	Santa Specials	
Tuesday	19th	00 Gauge DCC	
Tuesday	26th	Club running	11.30 onwards

January 2018

Tuesday	2nd	00 Gauge	
Sunday	7th	Public running	13.30
Saturday	13th	Club running	11.30 onwards
Monday	15th	Trustees meeting	19.30
Tuesday	16th	00 Gauge DCC	
Friday	26th	Young Engineers	19.30
Saturday	27th	Young Engineers	11.00
		Club running	13.30 onwards

Opinions expressed in PROSPECTUS are the personal views of the contributor and cannot be taken as reflecting the views of the club committee or editor.

**The deadline for the January PROSPECTUS is
18 December This is the final date.**

Contributions from all members are greatly welcomed
They may be submitted in hard or soft copy to the editor.

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