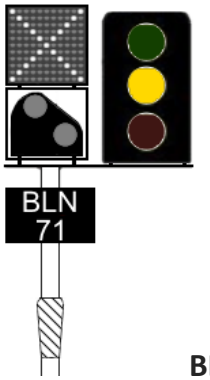
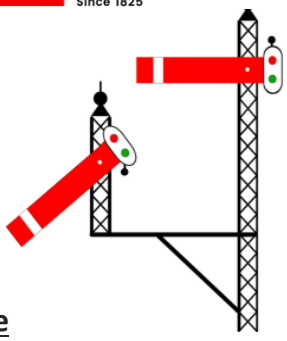
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# BRANCH LINE NEWS




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Website: https://branchline.uk and find us on Facebook
**Membership Sec Lisa Sheppard** membership.secretary@branchline.uk
186 Anlaby Park Road South, Hull, HU4 7BU. ✆07873 354464
British Isles news from members; an International section is available
Opinions are not necessarily those of the Compilers or of the Society



**BLN 1485 is dated Sat 20 Dec; all submissions by Wed 10 Dec please**

**2418] Editor's Note:** This BLN includes a reminder of the geographical areas 'roughly' covered by each BLN region, so that members know where to (please) send contributions. Some lines cross more than one region (the North Cotswold Line passes through three, for example). If necessary, a submission is placed according to its merits. If in doubt about the right area, please send it to the Editor for redirection. We are grateful for all the contributions and photos that our members send in, which is the basis of BLN.

| Date | ◎Book online - our website has all fixture details | BLN | Lead | Status |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| TBA | Apedale Railway railtours - pending new date | N/A | GL | FULL |
| **Fri 12 Dec** | **Cambridge Signal Box conducted visit** | **Website** | **MH** | **FULL** |
| **Fri 19 Dec** | **◎Christmas Train from King's Cross new GBRf locos** | **BELOW** | **MH** | **OPEN** |
| **Sun 21 Dec** | **◎Class 455 EMU Farewell railtour** | **Website** | **MH** | **FULL** |
| **Sat 31 Jan** | ***NEW* Non-public miniature railway Herefordshire** | **Website** | **MH** | **OPEN** |
| Sun 22 Feb | Save the date - more details to follow* | TBA | TBA | Claimed |
| **Mon 6 Apr** | ***NEW* ◎Easter Mon Scunthorpe Spring Steeler N°32** | **BELOW** | **PS** | **OPEN** |
| Sat 13 Jun | ***NEW*** Richmond Light Railway (2ft gauge) MR p19* | TBA | GL | Claimed |
| Mon 31 Aug | ***NEW*** Bank Holiday Scunthorpe Steeler N°32 | TBA | PS | Claimed |
| Sat 24 Oct | ***NEW*** AGM Weekend in East Anglia with fixtures* | TBA | TBA | Claimed |

**Bookings Officer** Martha Haggas (MH) bookings.officer@branchline.uk ✆07973 224601
Any post to Lisa Sheppard, please, as above. GL = Gary Lonsdale; PS = Paul Stewart. ***PROVISIONAL UNTIL OPEN**.

**2419] Fri 19 Dec; The Christmas Train *UPDATED*:** Raising funds for Great Ormond Street Hospital Charity (GOSH). Leaving **King's Cross P6** 07.50, we head down the ECML with GBRf **69**012 due to lead to **Doncaster** where a GBRf Class 66, that has never worked a passenger train before, is expected to take over for the rest of the tour; **66**316 has been requested. After various pickups, **Durham** is our first set-down for a three hour break or stay on to **Newcastle** for a shorter break. An on-train charity raffle will support Great Ormond Street Hospital Charity. First Class Dining includes a full traditional English breakfast on the outward journey and a three-course evening meal on return. A buffet car will serve a wide range of freshly prepared hot food, drinks, snacks and light refreshments.

**London King's Cross** (**PU 07.50**) - Welwyn Garden City - Huntingdon - **Peterborough P5** (**PU 09.15**) - Grantham - Retford - **Retford P2** (**PU 10.19**) - Babworth Loop - Doncaster Down Decoy (loco change) - Doncaster Down Fast - Shaftholme Jn - Colton Jn - **York** (**PU 11.45**) - Northallerton - Ferryhill Down Slow - **Durham P2** (**SD 13.00**) [optional break]- **Newcastle P2** (**SD 13.21**) [alternative` break] (**PU 15.33**) - Durham Up Passenger Loop - **Durham P1** (**PU 16.02**) - Tursdale Jn Up Slow - Darlington Up Fast - **York P9** (**SD 17.25**) - Colton Jn - Church Fenton - Ferrybridge North Jn - Knottingley South Jn - Doncaster Up Fast - Ranskill Loop - **Retford P1** (**SD 19.11**) - Grantham - **Peterborough P1** (**SD 20.12**) - Huntingdon - Welwyn Garden City - Holloway Junctions - **London King's Cross P1** (**SD 21.38**).

First Class, Dining (available from King's Cross and Peterborough to Durham or Newcastle only) at a guaranteed table for two £324; First Class Dining £299; First Class Non-Dining at a guaranteed table for two FULL; First Class Non-Dining £189; Standard Class £119. Under 18s £59.50 reduction on all fares.

**2420] Mon 6 Apr; Easter Monday, steel yourself for a great day out:** For less than a third of the cost of some railtours, you can enjoy a full day of unique railtouring in the UK's final integrated steel works in great company. There is over 100 miles of standard gauge track in the 2,800 acre site. If you have been before, things are always changing at this busy site; if you have never visited, you really must. Starting at **09.30** and finishing about **18.30**, subject to engineering work etc there is a 09.06 arrival from **Liverpool** at **Scunthorpe** (10-15 mins walk) and a 19.08 return with many connections. Free onsite parking.

You can expect to see miles of interesting railways, the UK's final blast furnaces in operation on this vast industrial railway and mainline freight trains (even on a Bank Holiday Monday). Our past experience is that this is a good day to be able to access unusual locations. Only £59 per person (under 18s £29.50) - an absolute 'steal', including a quality buffet lunch with sandwiches, nibbles, crisps, quiche, pork pies, sausage rolls, salad, cake etc and hot drinks. Members only, max 74. The proceeds support the work of the Appleby Frodingham Railway - Scunthorpe, entirely run by volunteers. A volunteer to write a BLN report would be appreciated and will result in one of the very limited places on the rear balcony of our brakevan special being allocated. Any track requests ASAP to Paul Stewart at bln.editor@branchline.uk

## 1484 BLN GENERAL (Paul Stewart) bln.editor@branchline.uk

**2421] Sat 22 Nov 2025 AGM:** Our 70th Anniversary AGM was held in **Middlesbrough** at the AV Dawson conference centre. It was probably the best ever venue in terms of facilities that we have used in our 70 years. Prior to the meeting, Caroline Hardie from the Friends of the Stockton & Darlington Railway (S&DR) gave a fascinating and entertaining illustrated talk about the S&DR. 2026-27 Subscriptions for paper BLN were fixed with a £5 increase for those taking BLN and BLNI or £4.50 for BLN alone. This will be the first increase for 12 years - note that in 2015 and 2016 subscriptions were actually reduced. Our great value electronic subscriptions remain unchanged at only £12 and Associate Membership at £5.

For paper BLN alone, the 2026-27 subscription will be only 50p more that members paid in 2014, despite inflation. Graham Easton was reappointed as the Members' Independent Accounts Examiner. Your Chairman, Graeme Jolley, gave an update on progress with Incorporation and the review of our Standing Orders. In his own inimitable style, our Fixtures Secretary Kev Adlam, presented a review of the previous 12 months of fixtures and railtours, then outlined plans for the next 12 months, summarised below. His well-illustrated presentation (53 pages) is available as a PDF supplement with e-BLN. From the floor, **East Anglia** was suggested for our **24 Oct 2026 AGM** and the team is working on ideas. The draft AGM minutes will be available in due course, when prepared and reviewed by your Committee.

**2422] 2026 fixture proposals:** All specifications are provisional until open for booking on our website.

- 31 Jan Private miniature railway in Herefordshire (no public running).
- 22 Feb Loco hauled exploration with a twist.
- XX Feb Behind the scenes tour with DB Cargo.
- XX Mar West Somerset Railway.
- XX Mar Ailsa Craig, the next big Class 37 instalment.
- 06 Apr Scunthorpe Spring Steeler N°32 (Easter Bank Holiday Monday).
- XX Apr International charter, Hannover and Braunschweig. In Germany.
- XX Apr Tytherington reloaded.
- XX May Cornwall, third time lucky! Loco hauled including Fowey.
- XX Jun The Lord of the Isles - loco hauled charter.
- 13 Jun Richmond Light Railway, 2ft gauge, Kent (MR p19).
- XX Jul Thumping along the Great Western.
- 31 Aug Scunthorpe Summer Steeler N°33 (August Bank Holiday Monday).
- XX Sep The Charity Train of all Charity Trains (4 days).
- 24 Oct AGM weekend and supporting fixtures in East Anglia.

**2423] Railway Heritage Trust:** Congratulations to our well-known member and Scotland BLN Editor, Greg Beecroft, on his recent appointment to the Advisory Panel of the Railway Heritage Trust, which marks its 40th anniversary this year. A 48 page, well illustrated booklet commemorating this anniversary has been produced and a PDF version with much of interest is available with e-BLN as a supplement.

**SPECIAL NOTE: With apologies, due to illness there is no BLNI 1484 this week**

**2424] Keeping Track, passenger service suspensions** + = may be longer * = new or amended

| BLN | Start (incl) | Reopens | Location (stations 'exclusive' if bracketed) Bold = closed now |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1480.2145 | 19 Oct 25 | *17 Nov 25 | *WM Metro Wolverhampton St George's branch to the points |
| 1483.2383 | ♣12 Nov 25 | ♠18 Nov 25 | *(Crediton) - Barnstaple; high river levels ♣At 16.30 ♠At 16.32 |
| 1478.1873 | 19 Aug 25 | *28 Nov 25 | *Dublin Luas (Busáras) - The Point; fire damaged bridge |
| 1484.2432 | ♥13 Dec 25 | INDEFINITE | *Ironville Junction - Pye Bridge Jn (site) - Kirkby Lane End Jn |
| 1480.2161 | ♥13 Dec 25 | INDEFINITE | Hambleton West Jn - Hambleton Sth Jn; SO *PSUL* ♥last booked |
| 1479.1946 | ♥13 Dec 25 | INDEFINITE | Tottenham South Jn - South Tottenham Station Jn and South Tottenham West Jn - Seven Sisters Jn; *PSUL* ♥date last booked |
| **1484.2517** | **29 Nov 25** | **8 Dec 25** | (**Ayr**) - **Stranraer**; extends to **Kilwinning** on Sun 30 Nov |
| - | 8 Dec 25 | 15 Dec 25 | (Castle Cary) - Athelney - Cogload Jn (Taunton) |
| 1484.2490 | 7 Dec 25 | 20 Dec 25 | Liskeard P3 - Looe; devegetation work, no winter Sun service |

**2425] Railway Memories** (**163**); **Student summers at Aberdeen station in the 1970s:** By Robin Dempsey - member 1330. (*I am reasonably confident of my memories but apologies if anyone disagrees!*)

On a sunny Friday in May 1975, I walked out of my school gates for the last time. On the Monday morning, I was ushered into the crowded, noisy, smoky porters' bothy at **Aberdeen Joint** station ('Joint' actually applied from opening to passengers (OP) on 4 Nov 1867 until about Sep 1952). It was full of 'old' men and an argument was in full flow - I can't remember what about. No, this was not the start of a long career when I worked my way up the ranks of BR (British Rail) but I did hope that, as a summer job before starting university, it would be a stepping stone to the BR traffic management training scheme.

My family had moved to pre-oil boom **Aberdeen** from Ayrshire in 1967. One of my grandfathers had been a foreman Bridge Repairer for the London, Midland & Scottish Railway. My earlier railway memories are hazy - I can recall a trip on a railbus from **Irvine** to **Kilmarnock** (CP 6 Apr 1964; closed all (CA) 11 Oct 1965, except for a headshunt at the west end to access **Irvine Goods**). Another memory was going to **Heads of Ayr** (last inward passenger train 7 Sep 1968 for Butlins Holiday Camp; last outward passenger train 14 Sep that year). I remember looking out of my grandparents' window to see engine smoke disappearing under bridges and hearing the clanking of goods wagons echoing around the town.

In **Aberdeen**, my interest in railways took off. My father took me on the doomed Great North of Scotland (GNSR) **Moray Coast** and **Dufftown** routes, a few weeks before the former CP/CA and the latter CP from 6 May 1968. To my eternal regret, a request to be allowed on the 2 Nov 1968 last train on the Speyside line (CA **Aviemore** to **Aberlour** 4 Nov 1968 and from the latter to **Dufftown** 16 Nov 1971), run by the Great North of Scotland Railway Association (GNSRA), was turned down. My father was more charitable a few months later on 24 May 1969 when, escorted by my brother, I was able to ride the 'Formartine & Buchan Express' on the then freight lines to **Peterhead** (CA from **Maud** 31 Aug 1970) and **Fraserburgh** (CA from **Dyce** 6 Oct 1979). The tour with 5323 (later **26**023) stopped at most of the closed stations; a horde of gricers would then invade the abandoned offices searching for any ephemera - there was usually some paperwork lying around. It was as if the staff had gone home one day and never returned.

The Deeside branch to **Ballater** CP 28 Feb 1966; **Culter** to **Ballater** CA 18 Jul 1966 and the rest from 2nd or possibly 5 Jan 1967. However, BR had been instructed to leave the infrastructure in place pending deliberations on possible reopening plans. So, some family days out would involve a visit to an abandoned signal box and an attempt at working the signals, or another raid on station offices seeing what was left. There were never any timetables or tickets sadly. The line was eventually lifted in 1970.

I acquired an Ian Allan locospotters book and, for a year or so, faithfully crossed off numbers but, showing promise as a future BLS member, decided this served no useful function and focussed on the railway scene more generally. I joined the Scottish Railway Preservation Society around 1970 and started attending their local meetings, hosted by Keith Jones who is still very active in the GNSRA.

So, stepping through the railway employment doors in 1975, I had in my mind that this world would have completely changed from the 1960s, with the demise of steam and the consequences of Beeching.

Looking back, it's now obvious that, other than the motive power, it was just slowly evolving. The biggest changes at **Aberdeen** came later, in the 1980s and 1990s. There was the change to DMU working, virtual elimination of loco haulage, far more frequent passenger services, the end of traditional restaurant cars, also wagonload freight, parcels, newspaper traffic, track rationalisation, the elimination of mechanical signalling and, in general, the end of the mixed-traffic railway. Not to mention privatisation.

As well as the daily Travelling Post Office service, every service might carry mail or parcels - there were Post Office staff permanently at the station and a fleet of BR parcel delivery vans was parked outside. There was at least one daily dedicated parcels train from the south and one north to **Elgin**. Long lines of blue 'Brutes' (British Rail Universal Trolley Equipment) would be noisily trundled along platforms and across the concourse by their electric tugs. Overnight, the station doors would be shut after the last passenger arrival, then, around 3am, they would be opened again, vans would drive in, tables set up and the concourse came to life again for the sorting of the daily newspapers after their arrival from **Glasgow**.

Services to the south had expanded thanks to the burgeoning oil industry. There was now a second daytime service to **King's Cross** with the latest air-conditioned stock (usually 11 carriages) and three overnight services, seven days a week. One of the sleeper services conveyed motorail vans.

There had been much rationalisation at the north end of **Aberdeen** station with passenger services north over the former GNSR metals, a shadow of what they had been 10 years earlier. The four bay platforms that end, on the east (Up) side, had been abandoned, as there was only a two-hourly DMU service to and from **Inverness** and the large North box now controlled only a handful of signals and points.

Traditional operations continued. Locos, almost exclusively Class 40s and 47s on the main services, would be coupled off [correct Scottish term] incoming trains and scuttle off to **Ferryhill Depot** before returning for a southbound train. A Class 08 with its two shunting staff would descend and remove the carriages, either to **Clayhills Carriage Sidings** or to release the loco and replace the stock in the requisite departure platform. Sets were regularly remarshalled, perhaps to move the refreshment car to another set due to the demands of the timetable or to shuffle the sleeping cars - inbound the sleeping cars were spread over three services, outbound there were just two with a third overnight seating only service.

Most challenging of all were the inbound **King's Cross** motorail vans - at the head of the lengthy inbound 'Night Aberdonian' which could only be accommodated in the long through P6 (Platform 6). The train engine took them off a mile up the north line to beyond the first signal, then reversed onto one of the remaining through lines. Here, a shunter loco would be waiting to deliver them to the unloading bay outside the station, which was accessible only from the south. However, on a Sunday, the North box was closed and a more delicate operation was involved in the centre of the station. The head of the train was taken over the crossover from P6 into P7, leaving the passenger coaches carefully positioned in P6.

Despite some additional services, there were still gaps in the timetable, with afternoons and Sundays seeming especially quiet. Many jobs revolved around arrivals and departures, so there was much time spent drinking tea in the bothies, or, in the evening, some staff (including students) were well known for surreptitious visits to the nearby Criterion Bar ('The Crit'). Strictly against the rules, of course.

Another shunting requirement was the removal of defective carriages. Every carriage on an incoming service was inspected at track level in the traditional way by a C&W Examiner, also known as the 'wheel tapper'. Occasionally out would come the examiner's 'Not to Go' pad, a piece of card would be nailed onto a carriage step, then it was over to the shunters to extract the offending vehicle.

Unlike today's frequent services, every departure was an 'event' rather than just one in a procession. The duty station inspector with his gold braided uniform would emerge from his office. There would be a two minute warning whistle, passengers hustled onboard, doors checked. Then another whistle, a wave of the green flag, the driver or secondman would lean back into his cab from an open window, there'd be a toot and it would be off. Even more of a ceremony was the mid-morning **King's Cross** departure, when the Station Manager himself would appear and do the honours.

A seriously negative effect of the 1970s oil boom was difficulty retaining enough staff of the right calibre. Local wages had grown rapidly but BR could only pay national rates. To try to compensate, staff were often working 12 hour shifts and/or their rest days.

Using students during their vacations was one way of alleviating this. The regular staff and managers were known to feel that we were a mixed blessing and somewhat resented as we didn't have to pay tax.

Turning to what I did each summer, in 1975 I wasn't yet 18, so I couldn't work nights and was trained as a 'waterman' (tank filler) - they only worked earlies and lates. This was carried out with hoses in the six-foot between platforms or in **Clayhills Carriage Sidings**. I soon learnt that the Second Class carriage tanks took much longer to refill than the First Class ones and Refreshment Cars. The bay platforms had maybe four or five hoses of different lengths attached to taps with widely varying pressures. So, with perhaps eight or nine tanks to fill, it was a case of moving down the track after the train arrived, connecting them up as quickly as possible, then patrolling up and down guessing which would be the next full one and changing the hose to the nearest untouched one - quite an art to doing it efficiently!

Now, this assumed the shunters left your train in place. Very often they didn't, so you had the spectacle of one or more of your hoses being dragged down the tracks until it fell off its carriage or snagged on pointwork. As well as reinstating the displaced hoses, you then had to find out where the carriages had been moved to and resume your filling work, or not, depending how diligent you were!

**Aberdeen South** box controlled the entrance to **Clayhills Depot**. There were two sets of sidings, each still identified with the pre-Grouping companies responsible for services to the south. As the train was being shunted past the box, one of the shunters would shout out to the signallers 'Caley' or 'NB' (Caledonian or North British), depending on where they wanted to deposit the coaches. **Clayhills** was a dark place at night but in 1975 proper overhead lighting was finally being installed.

The watermen had some additional duties. One was preparing tail lamps. The majority were paraffin but some newfangled battery ones were in use, although these had a high fault rate. On the early shift you were also responsible for collecting the large number of bags of laundry from the sleeper trains after they had been serviced. These were put into Brutes and loaded onto an **Edinburgh** service, bound for the railway laundry at **Slateford** (another casualty of privatisation).

One morning I was attending to the Class 120 DMU on an outgoing **Inverness** service, when I spotted smoke coming from an engine. I duly reported this and the DMU was shut down. The rather crummy **Aberdeen** spare Mk 1 set was summoned from **Clayhills**, a Class 26 or 27 appeared from **Ferryhill** and the service was off within 30 mins. I don't think that there are any 'spare sets' now? (To be continued.)

**2426] Query Corner; an unusual request:** The Brecon Mountain Railway has asked us if any of the participants in our excellent railtour on Mon 27 Oct measured the line end to end, buffer stop to buffer stop with GPS, as they would like to know how long it is, please! Replies to your Editor, please.

**2427] Baker Rail Atlas Great Britain & Ireland 16 Amendments &** (**Mostly**) **Updates 14:** (BLN 1483.2329)
✪Page 6 (D2) - **Blue Pool Halt** 'proposed' on the Swanage Railway just past **Norden** (BLN 1483.MR214).
✪Page 15 (C2) - **Portishead** and **Pill** now 'proposed 2026' (under construction 2026) (BLN 1483.2381).
✪Page 27 (C2) - **Cambridge South** opening date amended to June 2026 (BLN 1483.2376).
✪Page 76 (A1) - **W'hampton St George's** remove red dagger and 'temporarily closed' (BLN 1483.2332).

**2428] 2026 Rail Fare Freeze:** Although this is obviously welcome, it only applies to all regulated fares in England and then only private sector operators with National Rail Contracts or for those renationalised and run by the DfT. Open Access operators set their own fares (although accept valid National tickets). Fares on ScotRail, Caledonian Sleeper and Transport for Wales are set by the devolved governments. Tickets not covered by the freeze include Advance, Special Offers, Rovers, Rangers and circular tours.

**2429] Points & Slips: ●●1483.2394]** Following '**Stourbridge J N**' being automatically announced on a train, a member was on a bus recently where the next calling point was announced as 'Stop Ann'. This confused our member until he realised it was 'Stop A N' - most TfL bus stops have two letter codes.

**●●1483.2359]** The Stockton & Darlington **Middlesborough** branch opened in 1830 mainly to carry coal to the port for export - iron was an 'also ran'. The first train carried a huge block of coal weighing in at 3½ tons, amongst other things. It was loaded on to the brig 'Maria', which sailed for **London** next day.

**●●BLN 1482.2246]** The last 1500V DC electric loco over the **Newport** (**Middlesbrough**) **- Shildon** line ran on Sat 5 Jan 1935. Electrification was shut down from Mon 7 Jan 1935, reverting to steam haulage.

**2430] 2Z99:** (BLN 1482.2228) A member, who is a former railwayman, confirms that 2Z99 has never referred to a solitary traction unit not going to clear the line. It always referred to a snowplough, breakdown van or OHLE wiring train not going to clear the line and (he thinks from memory) an officer's special. A traction unit not going to clear the line is just an ordinary loco or unit and would be described with a 0 or 5 headcode. In the case of light engines, several regions had specific headcodes for depots and stabling points (**Doncaster Carr Loco** was 0D01). He believes that some region/s (London Midland?) used 0Z99 as a generic headcode for everywhere, the precise destination was passed on by phone.

**2431] Freedom of Severn & Solent - Part 3:** By Duncan Finch (BLN 1483.2335) **Wed 13 Aug 2025:** Today dawned very mild but grey and cloudy. I left my **Bournemouth** hotel to walk to **Branksome**. I could have taken one of the frequent local buses but decided not to. Roadworks near the Hotel meant a diversion from the obvious route and I was soon walking through several linear parks away from the busiest roads.

Arrival at **Branksome** was in time for the 09.03 **Weymouth** to **Waterloo**, with quite a crowd waiting. It was a single Class 444 (10-car 444s can't run west of **Poole** due to the power supply), which attached to another at **Bournemouth**. I went on to **Southampton** and changed for the Southern 10.50 to **Brighton**. This was a Gatwick Express liveried Class 387, looking a bit out of place. I had it almost to myself to **Woolston**. A quick visit to a local independent nautical themed café was next before the short walk to **Sholing**. This is only served by the hourly **Portsmouth & Southsea** stoppers. **450**005 took me to **Hamble**.

I have alighted here before but have never walked down into the town of **Hamble-le-Rice**. *En route* were two former level crossings of the B3397 on the closed BP Oil Refinery branch. The first still had the traincrew operated half barriers in place, very rusty. The trackbed disappeared into the undergrowth but, at the second crossing, on the refinery side of the road, the rails are still in place. The branch, across Hamble Airfield, hasn't seen an oil train since Dec 1985. Our 22 Mar 1975 Hampshire railtour, organised by Terry Velvick, visited the branch and 20 members also had a great internal railtour on 2 Feb 1985.

**Hamble-Le-Rice** gained fame in the mid to late 1980s, thanks to the BBC Yachting Drama 'Howards Way', largely filmed on the Solent in this area. I was here to use the passenger ferry service across to **Warsash**. There are records of a ferry here as early as 1493, when it was part of the only real route between **Portsmouth** and **Southampton**. Today it remains popular with cyclists on National Cycle Route 2.

The service is run by a local independent ferry and boating hire / repair firm and is famous locally for its PINK liveried boats! It runs 'on demand' within advertised operating hours. There is a mobile phone number displayed each end to call! However, in the season, it is unlikely that the ferry wouldn't be in constant use! So it transpired. I didn't have to wait long before 'Claire' arrived. Capacity is 12 (fewer with bikes); the fare is £2.50 each way, cash only. It is less than five minutes across the River Hamble to **Warsash**, where there is a waiting shelter at the jetty decked out in the corporate pink colours!

A 20 min walk took me into **Warsash** itself and an X4 **Southampton** to **Portsmouth** bus, for a 30 min journey to **Fareham**. On arrival there, it started raining but not heavily. There were also several rumbles of thunder. This turned out to be the only rain throughout my entire eight day Rover. I caught the 14.20 **Southampton** to **Brighton**, with required **377**432. Alighting at **Portchester**, it wasn't long to wait for the **Portsmouth & Southsea** stopper, again to **Hilsea**. A rather down at heel station, in an industrial area.

The Rover is only valid to **Portsmouth** from the **Fareham** direction, so I had to buy an add on ticket here for my last journey this day. The booking office, in a large portable cabin building, was closed but should have been open. A common theme sadly. So, it was to the card only ticket machine that I headed, for a single to **Bedhampton**. A **Waterloo** service took me this short distance. My Premier Inn this night was roughly equidistant between **Bedhampton** and **Havant**, where I concluded the day around 17.00.

**1484 EAST MIDLANDS** (**Nick Garnham**) east-midlands-news@branchline.uk
**Derbyshire (not Buxton & Hope Valley, which are in North West BLN), Leicestershire, Lincolnshire (& South Humberside), Northamptonshire, Nottinghamshire and Rutland.**

**2432] Yet another illegal closure:** (TRACKmaps 4 p12A 2022) From Mon 15 Dec, **Ironville Junction - Pye Bridge Jn** (**site**) - **Kirkby Lane End Jn** loses its last ***PSUL*** service, the 23.59 SSuX **Mansfield Woodhouse** to **Nottingham** becomes a 23.30 ECS instead. This retains crew knowledge; passengers were probably few.

**2433] Have a gander at this:** An enhanced timetable on Nottingham Express Transit during the recent Goose Fair resulted in a 13% increase in passenger numbers compared with 2024. That is around 68,000 extra journeys, which NET puts down to increased trust in the network and more local people using the trams at busy times. During the Goose Fair, attended by 490,000 people, although Ryan Gosling did not make an appearance, the evening service was enhanced and this continued for a month after it had finished. NET is collecting feedback which will help decide if the timetable should become permanent.

**2434] Thunderbirds are Go!** Following a recent procurement process, the NR contract to provide 'Thunderbird' locomotives on the East Coast Main Line at **Newark Northgate** was awarded to Colas. The contract (worth over £9M) starts in early Jan. It is thought that Colas will use their Class 67 locos, which can rescue any failed trains on the ECML. The Contract lasts for three years but there is the option for a further three year extension until Jan 2032. The present rescue locomotives are provided by West Coast Railways, who have had Class 47 and Class 57 locos based at **Newark** since the Spring of 2023.

**2435] Railcar?** In the early hours of 22 Nov, a vehicle which was being pursued by police went on to the railway at Lincoln Street Level Crossing between **Radford Jn** and **Bulwell**. A line block was taken for the car to be removed by the Mobile Operations Manager, who had to change a wheel on it and create a 'bridge' so it could be driven over some electrical bonds on the track. The line was clear in time for the first train of the day, the 05.17 from **Nottingham** to **Worksop** to run, with just a 10 min delay.

**2436] Derby:** Former Merseyrail 'celebrity' unit **507**001 in British Rail livery, owned by the Class 507 Preservation Society, recently made successful test runs on Alstom's Litchurch Lane test track which has third rail. **507**001 is regarded as the pioneer member of the class that once consisted of 33 units which served Merseyside suburban routes for over 40 years. The unit needed some repair work, in particular to a Motor Alternator (that creates AC for the lights etc). A successful repair was confirmed by the test runs. Further testing is needed and the unit will be used to 'train' apprentices and graduates.

## 1484 GREATER LONDON (Geoff Brockett) london-news@branchline.uk

**Includes all railways within the Greater London boundary - outside is South East North or South.**

**2437]** ❄ 🎄 **Christmas Engineering Work** 🎄 🎅**:** (BLN 1482.2327) All dates are inclusive and works taking place only in the early morning / late evening or on the weekend of 3-4 Jan are not listed.

Sat 27-Wed 31 Dec, no Southeastern service to **Victoria**, to replace rails, also for power and signalling upgrades. Most services run to **Charing Cross** or **Cannon Street** but there is no service between **Brixton** and **Beckenham Junction**. Also, no LO service between **Surrey Quays** and **Clapham Junction**. Fri 2 & Sat 3 Jan **Charing Cross** and **Waterloo East** are closed; most services divert to **Victoria** or **Cannon Street** or start from **London Bridge**. On 1st and 4th, **Cannon Street** is also closed, with most services diverted to **Victoria** or start from **London Bridge**. On all four days, **North Kent East Jn** to **Petts Wood** is closed, plus **Hither Green** to **Dartford** (**Hither Green** to **Sidcup** on 4th). The **Bromley North** branch is also closed, although there would be no service anyway on 1 Jan and Sun 4th. Services to **Ashford International** and beyond run from **Victoria** via **Bromley South**; **Hastings** services run from **London Bridge** via **Redhill**.

**South Bermondsey** station is closed from Sat 27 Dec to Sun 4 Jan for platform rebuilding. The platforms date back to the 1970s, when the original 1928 wooden platforms (from when the station was resited) were replaced with the current precast concrete trestle construction - now in a very poor state. From Thu 1 until Sun 4 Jan, no Southern service runs between **London Bridge** and **Tulse Hill** via **Peckham Rye**.

Sat 27-Wed 31 Dec, due to work betwixt **Blackfriars** and **Herne Hill**, no Thameslink service runs between **Blackfriars** and **Bellingham** and **Blackfriars** and the **Sutton Loop**. The latter is also suspended on 4 Jan.

Sat 27 Dec until Sun 4 Jan, eight switches & crossings and 1,000m of track will be replaced between **Nine Elms Jn** and **Clapham Junction**. This will involve alterations to **Queenstown Road** P2. There will also be upgrades to signals and track circuits and replacement of 950m of third rail. On 27-28 Dec, **Waterloo** is closed, with services starting from **Clapham Junction** or further afield. On 29-30 Dec and 1 Jan, a reduced service runs to **Waterloo** via **Wimbledon**, with minor changes on 31 Dec and 1-4 Jan. Windsor Line services start from **Clapham Junction** from 27 Dec until 3 Jan, with some services also doing so on 4 Jan. **Queenstown Road** is closed throughout and **Vauxhall** is closed Sat 27 until Tue 30 Dec and on Thu 1 Jan.

Because of the engineering work north of **Milton Keynes Central** (BLN 1483.2378), the only long distance trains at **Euston** from Sat 27 Dec to Sun 4 Jan will be Caledonian Sleeper services. These will be diverted via the ECML, reversing in **Wembley Yard** and will not run on 31 Dec and 1 Jan. Both Avanti and LNwR will run services to **Milton Keynes Central** but LNwR **Tring** local services will be cancelled.

To compensate for the WCML closure, Chiltern has an enhanced **Marylebone** to **Birmingham** service Sat 27 Dec to Sun 4 Jan. **Sudbury Hill Harrow** and **Sudbury & Harrow Road**, normally only open SSuX, will be closed throughout. Due to HS2 plant deconstruction and removal at **Wendover**, no **Marylebone** to **Aylesbury** via **Amersham** services run on Sat 27 & Sun 28 Dec. Presumably to free up units for the main line, this service only runs north of **Amersham** from 29 Dec to 2 Jan and is cancelled throughout 3-4 Jan.

From Sat 27 Dec until Thu 1 Jan, **Liverpool Street** is closed, with no access to the concourse. This is for ongoing roof renewal work above P1-10. Greater Anglia services on both the main line and West Anglia routes terminate at **Stratford**. London Overground services terminate at **London Fields** and c2c services that normally run to **Liverpool Street** run to **Fenchurch Street** via **West Ham**.

10 sets of switches & crossings are being replaced in the **Kensal Green Jn** area from 25 Dec to Sun 4 Jan. 220m of track will also be replaced with new drainage channels and rainwater catchpits installed. LO would normally run a **Stratford** to **Clapham Junction** service on 26th but this will only run between **Shepherd's Bush** and **Clapham Junction**, with no replacement buses. This continues until Sun 4 Jan. On the other side of the block, from 27 Dec, trains run from **Stratford** to **Gospel Oak** and from **Stratford** to **Camden Road** and then on to **Willesden Junction** bay P2 via **Primrose Hill**, calling at all stations.

Wed 24 Dec - Sun 4 Jan: No **Rayners Lane** to **Uxbridge** Piccadilly line service (autumn leaf fall mitigation).

**2438] Barking:** The UK Railtours Sat 27 Sep 'Ulster Express' to **Heysham** was cancelled on the day due to the London Underground 4TC set ECS sustaining severe wheel flats from the handbrake being left on. On Tue 2 Dec, the stricken stock was still stabled in **Barking Ripple HS1 Ripple Lane Exchange Siding 1**.

**2439] Docklands Light Railway:** (BLN 1475.1464) Approval was announced in the budget for the **Gallions Reach** to **Thamesmead** branch. However, most funding will come through TfL and the Greater London Assembly, with the Government also contributing an unspecified amount over the longer term.

*The government will continue to work with London to finalise funding details and will continue to work with the GLA to look at options for innovative financing to support the delivery of infrastructure projects in the capital* (budget document). Construction is likely to begin in 2027/28, with the first trains running in 2033. There was no mention in the budget of the Bakerloo line Extension or West London Orbital Line.

**2440] Feltham Depot:** (BLN 1365.3305) Not previously recorded in BLN, the first SWR arrivals at the new £60M depot were on Sun 16 May 2021. The first departure was at 04.45 on Mon 17 May 2021. Initially nine drivers were based there, transferring from **Staines**, with the establishment set to increase to 42 drivers and two driver managers. The **Up & Down Arrivals Road** with connections and crossovers each end - **Feltham East Jn** (14m 25ch) & **Feltham Depot West Jn** (14m 55ch) - plus the connection from the **Up & Down Arrivals Road** to the new sidings had been commissioned from 2 Nov 2020. **Feltham Depot** was used regularly from the12 Dec 2021 timetable change.

**2441] Help Wanted:** A member writes that, on a wintry Sunday afternoon in 1968, 1969 or 1970, he went to **Wimbledon** because the Up line to **Clapham Junction** was closed due to engineering works and trains were diverted via **East Putney**. However Down trains were still running via **Earlsfield**. So, as there were no replacement buses, for the price of a day return to **Earlsfield** he went to **Clapham Junction** and back. Can anyone give a date please? [BLN at the time doesn't provide any information.]

**2442] Elizabeth line SLW:** (TRACKmaps 3 p1C 2023) On Sun 30 Nov, a member on the 07.13 from **Abbey Wood** to **Paddington** confirms that it ran directly westbound out of P4 on the bidirectional Eastbound Line. It ran non-stop through **Woolwich** Platform 'A', then crossed to the normal Westbound line via the trailing crossover at 17.386km before **Custom House** to call at normal Platform 'B' there. This was booked until, and including, the 09.44 from **Abbey Wood** to **Reading** and is booked again on Sun 7 Dec. To accommodate the Single Line Working, no trains call at **Woolwich** in either direction until 10.00. [This item is a good example of how the best time to document history is while it is actually happening.]

**2443] Northern City Line:** (BLN 1481.2128) Railfuture (RF) is questioning if TfL is best placed to take over Great Northen inner suburban services. According to RF, there is an agreement that drivers only go into **Moorgate** twice a day due to noise, dust etc. If this remains, then that surely makes a TfL takeover impractical. Other concerns include a loss of synergy from shared maintenance facilities at **Hornsey** and introduction of another operator on the ECML. How would disruption be handled at stations such as **Hatfield**, shared by inner and outer suburban services? Some stations are in Hertfordshire, where the residents would have no democratic say in how the service is run. Pre-Covid, the SSuX off-peak service was 4tph on both legs but is now only 2tph. Weekend services have remained at 2tph. The best option seems to be for GTR and its nationalised successor to retain the service with an increased frequency.

**2444] A new *PSUL*:** From Sun 14 Dec, **Junction Road Jn - Gospel Oak Jn** gains a 23.24 SuO **Barking Riverside** to **Willesden Junction LL** (with **Kensal Green Jn** to **Willesden Junction LL** for no extra cost!).

**2445] Low Carbon Track Renewal:** 1,150yds of plain track have been renewed between **Honor Oak Park** and **Forest Hill** using low carbon, sustainable materials. A 63% reduction in carbon emissions resulted from the following innovations: ✪Green steel rail produced using an electric arc furnace. ✪Low-carbon concrete sleepers. ✪Recycled blended ballast. ✪Renewable biofuel. ✪Solar-powered welfare units.

**2446] Further 14 Dec Timetable Changes:** (BLN 1483.2342) Greater Anglia: Most West Anglia peak services are retimed. SSuX peak direction calls at **Cheshunt** are mostly made by **Stansted Airport** trains, instead of **Cambridge** services. The **Stratford** to **Meridian Water** shuttles are currently 2tph daily, except during the evening peak SSuX when there is only 1tph. This increases to 2tph. London Overground: Peak services to and from **Cheshunt** and **Enfield Town** are retimed to give more even intervals, to relieve overcrowding at **Seven Sisters**. The 00.16 SO **Enfield Town** to **Liverpool Street** also runs Tue to Fri.

**2447] Brixton LU:** As part of the 'Art on the Underground' programme, a mural has been installed for a year above the entrance stairs depicting influential figures, landmarks and history from the area.

**2448] Cashback on fares:** Chase online bank has a £12.5M sponsorship deal over five years, with its logo displayed on ticket barrier card readers. Account holders receive 1% cashback on debit card payments for fares on LU, London Overground, the Elizabeth line and DLR. Maximum Cashback is £15 per month on all transactions. A year after opening an account, customers must pay in at least £1,500 per month.

## 1484 NORTH EAST & YORKSHIRE (Geoff Blyth) north-east-news@branchline.uk

**County Durham, Northumberland, Teesside, Tyne & Wear and Yorkshire (not Lincolnshire please!)**

**2449] Sheffield Supertram:** ❶South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority has agreed to freeze all fares from 1 Jan and reduce the adult long-distance single fare from £3.40 to £3 to match the national bus fare cap price. Child concessionary fares will remain at £1 per journey (as for local bus services). A local radio, social media and poster campaign has started to encourage people to travel on Supertram. From Sep 2027, local buses will start to be taken into public control again with a franchising model.

❷With Storm Claudia, there was a high risk of the River Don bursting its banks near **Rotherham Central**. Therefore, **Holmes Jn** to **Aldwarke Jn** via **Rotherham Central** was closed from 16.00 on Fri 14 Nov until 12.00 on Sat 15 Nov, to disconnect 'signalling assets' and prevent them being damaged by floodwater. This enabled them to be restored and the line reopened much faster. The closure was later extended until 07.30 on Sun 16 Nov. Almost all trains ran but were diverted via the main line between **Holmes Jn** and **Aldwarke Jn**. Tram-trains were cancelled, with replacement buses running between **Parkgate** and **Tinsley Meadowhall**. The floodwater receded to an acceptable level by 14.00 on Sat 15 Nov, so the signals were then reconnected and tested, with the line reopening to all traffic at 00.19 on Sun 16 Nov.

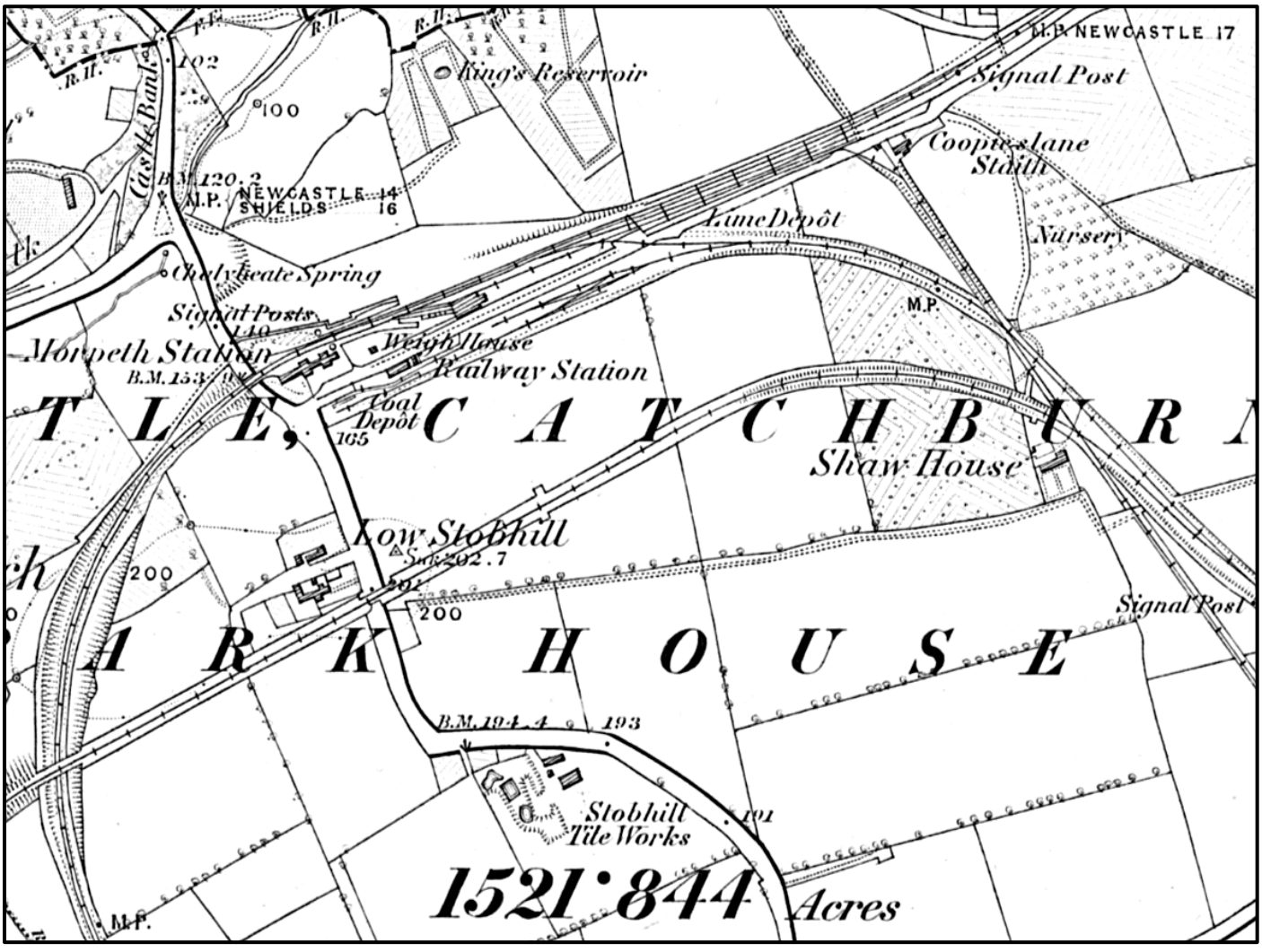
**2450] York:** A concrete bus shelter canopy was built in 1940, attached to the station frontage. It is now in very poor condition such that the York Station Gateway project contractors are unwilling to work underneath it, in case it collapses. A planning application has been submitted for its emergency removal.

**2451] Filey:** NR has completed the £3.6M refurbishment of the Grade II* station building, supported by contributions from the Railway Heritage Trust. Opened in 1846, it was designed by the NER architect GT Andrews. It retains its original character as a station from the first half of the 19th Century. The project included repairs to the lantern roof, with extensive glazing and tile work, also installing safe walkways.

**2452] Morpeth:** Travelling south to a meeting in **York**, a member noted that Blyth & Tyne Railway (B&T) station buildings survive at **Morpeth**, south of the NER station on the Up (P1) side. The main building is Grade II listed, the English Heritage description (summary): Former Blyth & Tyne Railway terminus, now a shop and office. 1864. Dressed stone with ashlar dressings. Welsh slate roof. 2-storey, 5-bay centre with single-storey wings. Centre section: Central stone, gabled porch with panelled door on right return. A second panelled door with fanlight, in raised alternating-block surround, in left bay. The ground floor has round-headed 12-pane sashes in similar surrounds; the first floor has 12-pane sashes in similar surrounds. Dentil cornice, gabled roof; two end and two ridge stacks. Wings each have one similar round-headed window. Wing to right has extension with three small lunette windows. Similar detail to rear.

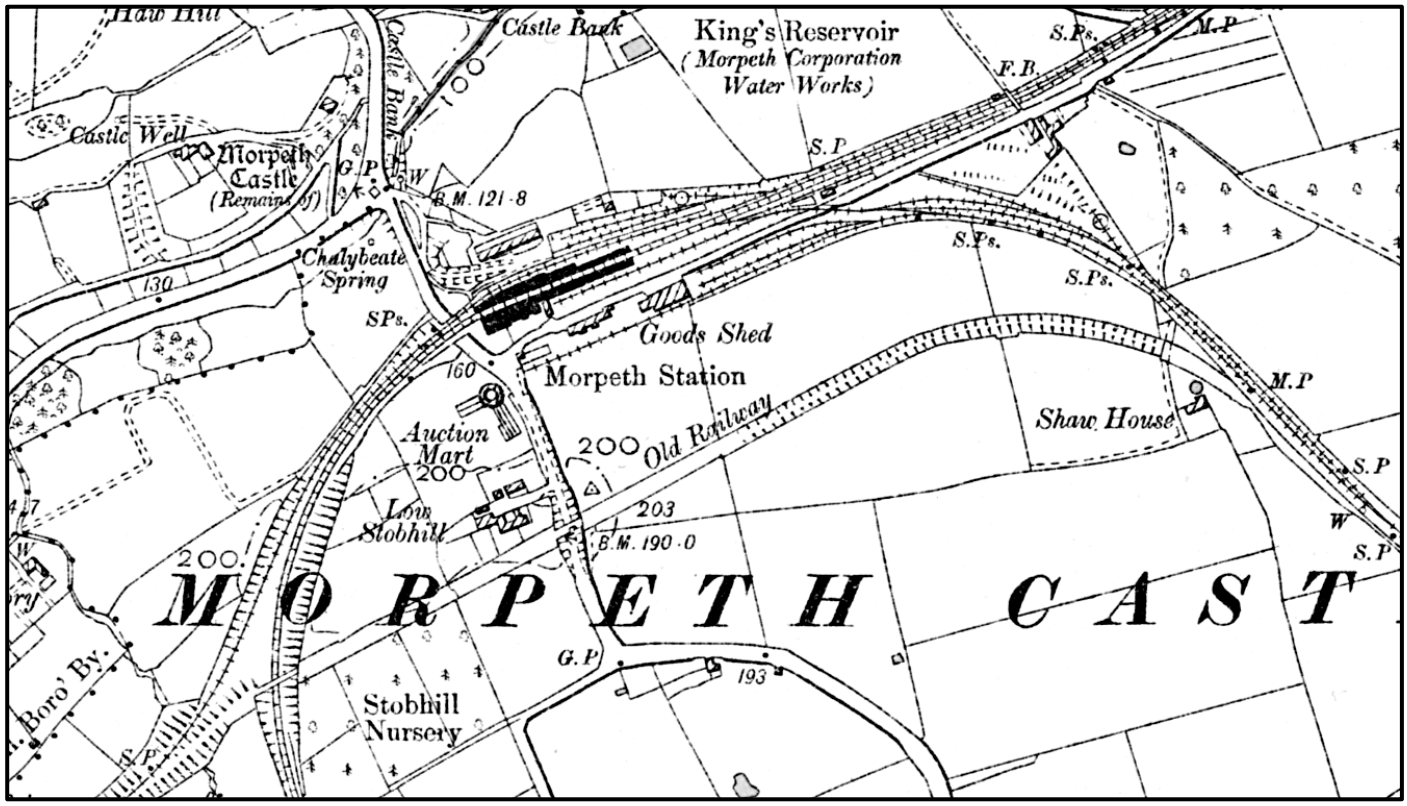
The large 1879 NER goods shed, which is not listed, also remains. Michael Quick's 'Railway Passenger Stations in Great Britain' Version 5.05, Sep 2023, has **Morpeth** (B&T) OP 1 Apr 1858 ('The Times' of 3 Apr 1858); CP 24 May 1880 (Morpeth Herald of Sat 29 May 1880), when the service was diverted to the North Eastern Railway (NER) station. It was also used by the North British Railway (NBR) from 23 Jul 1862, until trains were diverted to the NER station from 3 May 1872 (John Gough, Chronology Jan 2004).

The Wansbeck Railway (BLN 1373.821), absorbed into the NBR from 20 Jul 1864, was constructed from **Reedsmouth** to **Morpeth**, because the NBR wished to reach **Newcastle** and aimed to do so via the B&T. It OA from **Scots Gap** to **Morpeth** on 23 Jul 1862 but did not have its own station there, so used the B&T station. This required it to bridge the NER main line and for trains to reverse at **Barmoor Jn** (east of **Morpeth**), then propel into the B&T station. **BELOW:** 6" to a mile 1866 map. **Berwick-upon-Tweed** is off top right; **Newcastle** is off the bottom; the NBR goes off bottom left corner, crossing over the NER (now the East Coast Main Line) to join the B&T lower right, where a reversal was made to reach Morpeth NER.




The NBR route was a longer, less convenient route between **Edinburgh** and **Newcastle** than the NER **Berwick** line but it has been suggested that the NBR's main motivation was to obtain better terms from the NER for sharing the East Coast revenue. This turned out to be pointless, because the NBR withdrew its opposition to the amalgamation of the NER and the Newcastle-upon-Tyne & Carlisle Railway (N&CR)

in 1862 (BLN 1481.2140). This was in return for being granted running powers between **Hexham Jn** and **Newcastle** but the NBR had to give the NER running powers to **Edinburgh**. This was before the Wansbeck line was completed and resulted in a change at **Reedsmouth**, so that the junction faced **Hexham** instead of **Riccarton Jn**, as originally planned. The NER / N&CR merger took effect on 17 Jul 1862, although less than a week later, it was backdated to 1 Jan 1859. This left the NBR with a railway unlikely to have been remunerative and was strategically redundant. Until the NBR trains ran to **Morpeth** NER station from 3 May 1872, they had to set back into the adjacent Blyth & Tyne station. Despite the NBR using the NER station, things did not go well. David Ross (in 'The North British Railway, A History') writes that passenger connections at **Morpeth** were very poor because of the unfriendly relations between the NER and NBR.




**ABOVE: Morpeth** in 1898; the original Wansbeck Railway alignment is then labelled 'Old Railway'.

On 29 Sep 1962, the Stephenson Locomotive Society / RCTS 'North Eastern Rail Tour' (not on Six Bells Junction website) Day 3 ran from **Morpeth** to **Rothbury** and back. Significant delays at **Morpeth** due to resignalling there meant that it did not do **Scotsgap - Reedsmouth - Bellingham** as had been scheduled.

**2453] TP Upgrade:** ❶By mid-Nov, between **Church Fenton** and **Neville Hill**, much new signalling had been erected or laid in the cess both sides of the line. It is bagged for future commissioning. Between **Garforth** and **Cross Gates** at Crawshaw Woods overbridge (BLN 1481.2135.1), the new higher, concrete abutments and approaches appeared complete but the bridge itself had not yet been placed onto them.

❷**Mirfield** is closed from 23-26 Dec (incl) to commission new P1 & P2, realigning the track through the station, work on Station Road underbridge and installing new signalling. Later, drainage will be installed in the car park and permanent lighting on the approach. P3 will remain in use throughout this period.

❸(BLN 1479.1962) At **Deighton** on 25-26 Dec, Whitacre St overbridge will be demolished before being replaced by a taller, wider structure for the new track alignment and the installation of OHLE.

**2454] Sheffield - Huddersfield:** In the imminent Dec 2025 timetable, the 22.36 **Sheffield** to **Huddersfield** (arr 23.59) has been reduced to running FSO, which was not mentioned in the timetable consultations. Mondays to Thursdays, a bus from **Barnsley** connects out of the 22.30 from **Sheffield** but does not arrive at **Huddersfield** until 01.10. Local rail user groups are not amused but the DfT will be happy.

**2455] Ferriby:** (TRACKmaps 2 p39B 2025) Track lifting started in mid-Nov at Gibson Lane, Ferriby Omya UK sidings, on the south side of the running lines between **Ferriby** and **Brough**. The sidings furthest from the running line were the first to be lifted. Omya produces industrial minerals, mainly fillers and pigments from calcium carbonate and dolomites. Presumably the plant once received dolomite by rail.

**2456] Ferryhill:** Fifty years ago, at 08.58 on 9 Dec 1975, a freight train travelling along the Up Ferryhill***** line coming off the **Stillington** branch derailed in the vicinity of **Ferryhill South Jn**. Three railway personnel suffered from shock and were detained in hospital overnight for observation. [*****Then the **Stillington** branch Down line ran from **Ferryhill** to **Norton South Jn**; the opposite applies today.] Fortunately, the adjacent Down and Up East Coast Main lines were not obstructed. However, potentially just as serious, perhaps even more so, was the fact that the train involved included in its formation five wagons of discharged deadly hydrocyanic acid (HCN) - hydrogen cyanide. This led to its being described as a major incident. In addition to the fire services and the police, a special team from Imperial Chemical Industries (ICI) attended. The police decided to evacuate the occupants of houses to the west of the lines to a safe distance from the derailment but, surprisingly, no doctors were called.

6K46, the 07.55 **Haverton Hill** to **Grangemouth**, with a maximum speed of 45 mph, departed at 08.25. It consisted of two barrier wagons, five discharged HCN tank wagons, two further barrier wagons, 13 laden vanfits conveying bagged fertilisers and a brakevan, hauled by diesel **37**004. The journey was uneventful past the following signal boxes: **Belasis Lane**, **Billingham Jn**, **Norton Station**, **Norton East** (all closed 6 Feb 2021), **Norton West** (closed 30 Jan 2021), **Stillington** (closed 15 Feb 1992) and **Bishop Middleham** (closed 30 Apr 1984), signalled by the Absolute Block Regulations. Unknown to the train crew, the rearmost of the five unladen tank wagons had partially derailed on plain track at 7m 22ch, about 1¾ miles south of **Bishop Middleham** signal box. The latter was a very tall box, which prevented the signalman seeing Up trains passing in front of it. Inevitably, at a trailing connection at **Ferryhill South Jn**, the partially derailed tank wagon caused the points to be damaged. This resulted in its total derailment as well as the tank wagon ahead of it, the two barrier wagons to its rear and the following nine vanfits. The 10th, 11th and 12th vanfits were not derailed but the last vanfit and the brakevan were. The train came to a stand, divided between the 4th and 5th tank wagons.

The signalman (as they all were known as in 1975, regardless of sex) at **Ferryhill** signal box (**Ferryhill №2** until 28 Nov 1971 and closed from 30 Jan 2021) had accepted 6K46 from **Bishop Middleham** and, shortly afterwards, received the Train Entering Section bell signal. After transmitting the train forward to the **Tyne** and **Newcastle** signal boxes, he noticed that one of his track circuits remained occupied. Looking south and seeing a cloud of dust, he realised that something was wrong and sent the 'Obstruction Danger' bell signal (6 beats) to **Bishop Middleham** at the same time as someone phoned from a signal post to report the derailment and that a tank wagon was on its side. Control was advised immediately. There were initial fears that the derailed tank wagon was leaking, hence the need to evacuate nearby properties. However, after close examination by an ICI manager (who had donned protective clothing because, as it was being lifted, a considerable quantity of water had run out behind the aluminium cladding), who confirmed that there had been absolutely no leakage of HCN.

The official Report into the derailment, consisting of 19 pages including an Appendix, was compiled by Lt Col AG Townsend-Rose on behalf of the Railway Inspectorate. It was published on 23 Aug 1976 and went into extensive technical detail as to the state of the track, the suitability of the tank wagons to carry such highly toxic material, speed and the lack of advice given to the **Ferryhill** signalman about what the train conveyed. Note that the wagons were considered as being 'empty' only when they had been cleansed of all HCN, which was not the case for the 'discharged' wagons on this train.

Despite the Eastern Region Chief Civil Engineer's assertion that the derailment was caused by a fault on the tank wagon, the Inspecting Officer disagreed. He clearly stated that 'there was nothing in the condition of the tank wagon or its maintenance that contributed to the derailment'; he was 'satisfied that the train had been properly prepared', speed was not an issue either. The cause of the derailment was the below-standard curved track encountered before 6K46 reached **Bishop Middleham**.

99.97% pure HCN was transported in tank wagons between **Grangemouth** and the ICI Cassel works at **Billingham**. Above 0.1% water made it unstable; if it was allowed to stand, it could eventually explode! It was therefore tested on arrival at Cassel Works. Although barrier wagons were used when running on BR metals, the tank wagons were simply hauled or propelled as required on the ICI system. It was also taken from **Haverton Hill** (**Billingham East Grid Sidings**) about 6 miles to the Monsanto (later BASF) plant on the **Seal Sands** branch, which manufactured Acrilan synthetic fibre. (Remember those jumpers?)

**2457] York - Harrogate:** (BLN 1483.2356) About 20 years ago, NR had difficulty staffing **Starbeck** box. A member's colleague used to drive to **Knaresborough** for an early morning **York** train. Sometimes she found it was not running, as **Starbeck** box was closed (again!). Fortunately, another regular passenger on the train from **Knaresborough** was a railway employee who also worked at **York** but crucially was qualified to work **Starbeck** box. He walked to the station, then the colleague drove him to **Starbeck**, less than two miles by road, so he could open the box. She would then drive back to **Knaresborough**, where another regular passenger would make sure that her parking space in Station Road was not taken (there is no station car park). The train could not leave **Harrogate** until **Starbeck** box was open, so she usually made it back to **Knaresborough** by the time her train arrived but, if not, it waited for her!



**The King's Award for Voluntary Service**

**2458] S&DR:** The Friends of the Stockton & Darlington Railway has been awarded the King's Award for Voluntary Service, the highest honour awarded to a community group. The volunteers have given tens of thousands of hours over more than a decade, preserving and promoting the S&DR. **We are delighted to report that our 21-23 Nov AGM weekend fixtures in the North East resulted in a donation of £5,500 to the Friends**.

**2459] Darlington:** With commissioning of the signalling for the station capacity project (BLNs 1483.2360 & 1480.2160.1) from 03.45 on 2 Dec 2025: The new Up through P5 remains barred to all Class 1, 2, 3, 5 and 9 trains until further notice. It can be used during perturbation but only on the authority of the local duty manager. The train crew must be instructed not to open the doors. The new east side Up end bay P6 remains out of use for all passenger services until further notice.

**2460] Bradford Forster Square:** Plans for improvements to the station, first proposed in 2017, included a new ticket office, toilets, shops and improved lift access. The most recent cost estimate was £17.3M. However, it is now also 'expected' to be the terminus of the mass transit system from **Leeds**, so design changes might well be needed. The plans have therefore been 'paused'. A draft version of the revised Outline Business Case was prepared but public consultation has also been paused. Wonderful.

**2461] Pontefract**; **a piece of cake:** NR has presented the **Prince of Wales** (Colliery) signal box nameboard to the Prince of Wales Colliery Memorial Group. It had been in storage since the box was demolished in 2024 after resignalling transferred control to **Ferrybridge** box (BLN 1456.2176). The box used to be just north of **Pontefract Monkhill** on the **Castleford** line. The colliery was sunk in 1860 but mining did not begin until 1869. In 2001, geological problems were encountered. An investigation found that the cost of extracting the remaining 8.8M tons of coal was too high and the mine closed on 30 Aug 2002.

**2462] T+W Metro:** ❶On 13 Oct, a member observed new units **555**025 and **555**030 in **York Holgate Reception Sidings**, with **20**007 + **20**205 at the head. They formed 6Q26 22.00 to **Pelaw Jn** that night. The delayed delivery of three units, originally planned overnight on 6-7 Nov and 7-8 Nov, took place on 13-14 Nov and 14-15 Nov. It is thought that they had suffered wheel flats *en route* in France. This brings the total number delivered to 37 of the 46 units, leaving another nine (**555**022/23/26/29/33/42/44/45&46) to be delivered. **555**024 arrived on 14-15 Nov but had an extended stay in **Pelaw** sidings due to staff resource issues (below). **20**205 + **20**007 worked the return 03.04 **Pelaw Jn** to **York Yard North** on 15 Nov, passing **Tollerton** 23 min early but both then ran out of fuel! They were recovered by the Newark 'Thunderbird' loco, which was in the area at the time, and passed **Skelton Bridge Jn** 86 min late. ❷17 diagrams of 28 are now rostered for new units SSuX; 10 out of 27 SO and 9 out of 22 SuO. SSuX: 101, 102, 103, 104, 106, 108, 109, 110, 112, 121, 123, 125, 127, 131, 132, 133 & 135; Saturdays: 102, 104, 106, 108, 110, 121, 124, 125, 127 & 129; Sundays: 101, 102, 105, 121, 123, 125, 126, 127 & 130. ❸A new signal on **St James** P2 enables new units to use the platform. Before, they had to run a short distance into the overrun tunnel as the departure signal was not easily visible from a Class 555 cab. This resulted in one of the passenger doors becoming slightly obstructed by the anti-trespass sign. The old signal remains as a co-acting signal '479 CA', the first co-acting signal on Metro-owned tracks.

❹ Between 14 and 18 Nov, early morning and late night services were disrupted by depot control staff shortages. Some units had to be outstabled overnight rather than returning to **Gosforth Depot**.

❺ The half way point has now been reached in disposal; 45 of the 90 old Metro units had left following departure of 4086 on 5 Nov. 43 have now been scrapped [4002, 03, 04, 06, 07, 10, 11, 12, 13, 16, 18, 21, 22, 25, 30, 31, 33, 34, 36, 37, 40, 47, 48, 52, 54, 55, 57, 58, 62, 63, 64, 66, 67, 70, 72, 76, 77, 80, 82, 83, 84, 86 & 88 if you are interested!]. 4001 and 4019 went elsewhere (BLN 1480.2159). Some of the latest units to be scrapped have departed directly from **Howdon Depot** and were not moved from **South Gosforth** by other units. 4066 moved under its own power within the depot to the ramp, where it was winched onto the waiting trailer for onward road transfer to J Denham Metals, Shildon.

**1484 NORTH WEST (John Cameron)** north-west-news@branchline.uk **Cumberland / Westmorland & Furness, Cheshire, Buxton & the Hope Valley, Greater Manchester, Lancashire and Merseyside.**

**2463] Blackpool Trams:** A new timetable was introduced from Sun 30 Nov, due to the end of the busy part of the illuminations season (the illuminations continue daily until 4 Jan). Trams will run up to every 10 mins on sections of the line. During the main part of the day, the new service pattern is:

- **Starr Gate** to **Fleetwood Ferry** (direct) both ways every 30 minutes.
- **Starr Gate** to **Fleetwood Ferry** via **North Station** both ways every 30 minutes.
- **Fleetwood Ferry** to **Pleasure Beach** (direct) both ways every 30 minutes.

These result in trams every 15 mins between **Starr Gate** and **Pleasure Beach**, while the rest of the line has trams up to every 10 mins (but not all are evenly spread). However, **North Station** is only served half hourly. This is the first time since the modernised tramway reopened on 4 Apr 2012 that regular Flexity services have used **Pleasure Beach** as a terminus; they will have to use the turning loop (will it be ECS?). Evenings have trams every 15 mins from each end, with alternate departures going via **North Station**.

**2464] Castleton North Jn - Castleton South Jn:** (BLN 1472.1118) (TRACKmaps 4 p45A 2022) It looks as though this unidirectional line, out of use since 00.49 on 17 Nov 2019, is still to be commissioned. (**Castleton South Jn** was plainlined until relaying in Sep 2024, when the railway bridge over the M62 was replaced.) On Sat 7 Mar, UK Railtours has a through train from **Watford Junction** (and selected stations to **East Midlands Parkway**) through to the East Lancashire Railway. It is not using this curve on its return.

**2465] Widnes, Alstom Train Care Centre:** (BLN 1483.2415) (TRACKmaps 4 p37A 2022) By your Editor. Alstom's ancestry in the Widnes area dates back to the 1830s, when the Vulcan Foundry was opened at nearby **Newton-le-Willows** to produce rails for the Liverpool & Manchester Railway. In 1842, the Manchester & Birmingham Railway opened **Manchester Longsight Depot**. Taken over and developed by Alstom as the principal West Coast Pendolino base, it is still open and is the oldest continuously operational depot in the world - in railway use for 183 years and counting.

Dick Kerr & Co opened their **Preston** factory in 1893, mainly to produce electric tram cars and associated equipment. English Electric acquired Dick Kerr & Sons and the Vulcan Foundry in 1928 and 1955 respectively. The company then merged with GEC (the General Electric Company) in 1969, who themselves merged with French firm Alsthom in 1989. That company was then involved in many engineering activities, including ship building, as well as railways. The name was simplified to Alstom in 1998 as part of a rebranding exercise on the flotation of the Company. In 2007, Alstom, which had from the start been very much involved in French high speed rail activities, delivered the first section of Britain's HS1. Later, in 2015, the company changed focus to concentrate solely on railway activities.

Alstom is now a worldwide company with activities ranging from building stock for light rail, metro, conventional rail, high speed and 'very high speed' systems. They are also involved in signalling, railway services such as modernisation, maintenance, spares, repair and overhaul, systems and infrastructure.

Alstom employs over 86,000 people (more than 22,000 in Europe) at 264 sites in 63 countries and has around 200 customers. Worldwide they have around 50 repair workshops, with many rail vehicles under parts agreements. They stock a million train components. This could be many fewer if trains had standard parts but a large variety of different rolling stock is covered, ranging from cars just a few years old to London Underground battery electric locos over 60 years old.

The company has a large presence in the UK and Ireland, continuing to maintain the Avanti West Coast tilting Pendolino Class 390s they built at the start of the 21st Century for Virgin Trains and (in partnership with Hitachi at **Oxley Depot**, **Wolverhampton**) the new non-tilting Avanti West Coast Class 805 ('Evero' Electric Multiple Units) and Class 807s Bimodes. Alstom also maintains the London Overground fleet, TPE Class 397 Bimodes, Northern Line stock, Class 180 DMUs and Nottingham Trams for example. Other key activities in the UK are train modernisation, signalling (the most recent installations being **South Kirkby** early in 2025 and **Tulse Hill** in late 2024), electrification, infrastructure and rail system supply.

**Widnes Technology Centre** (as then named) opened on 29 Jun 2017; in 2018, Alstom transferred the activities of its **Preston** plant there with 90 of its employees. **Widnes** is the UK's largest and first purpose-built intercity modernisation facility. It also modernises, repairs and overhauls traction equipment (previously carried out at the **Preston** site). There is flexible capability for new build, overhaul, modernisation, corrosion repairs, also traction equipment overhaul and modernisation. Key features include the highest environmental standards in the design of the building. It is adjacent to the West Coast Main Line, with easy rail access from **Ditton Reception Siding N°1** and has overhead electrification.

Inside the building, there are three modernisation roads in a 265m long shed and three 'state of the art' paint spraying facilities. The longest line is Road 1 (nearest the main line), which can accommodate a complete 11-car Pendolino for example. There are also two traction-equipment modernisation, repair and overhaul workshops with the relevant test-cell capability. The first contract, begun in 2017, was the Pendolino fleet (56 trains, 574 vehicles) mid-life exterior cosmetic repairs and repaint. These trains first entered service in Jan 2003. Another early contract involved Transport for Wales Class 175 DMUs.

They initially came in for a 'quick repaint' but significant corrosion was found. Each unit was 'admitted' for much longer than expected at first, with much more extensive work required. After completing the Pendolino repaint, in 2020 Widnes Train Care Centre won a £117M contract to modernise and refurbish the entire Pendolino fleet. Each train took two weeks and the project was completed in June 2024.

Projects in the traction equipment workshops have included LU Northern line gearbox overhauls and the unique HS1 vacuum circuit breakers for Hitachi, which operate to prevent arcing (which can create dangerous plasma) at overhead line electrification neutral sections. They also operate if there is a short circuit or a pantograph drop, again to prevent arcing. The range of work carried out at Widnes has included Class 701 traction modifications, power inverter modules for the Voyager fleet, Dublin tram traction motors and Jubilee line switch gear. Other contracts have included a £25M upgrade of South Western Railway Class 458 EMUs and refurbishment of four 6-car sets of Mk4 stock, now used by Transport for Wales as 5-car sets. Some were originally intended for the proposed, but since cancelled, Grand Central **Blackpool** to **Euston** service. **Widnes** has refurbished six Class 222 'Meridians' for the Lumo **Stirling** to **London** open access service. Class 378 EMUs and 180 DMUs are now being refurbished.

There are two resident Class 08 shunters, **08**454 and **08**721 'Ken Davies'. Ken joined Alstom in 2002, managing the company's operations along the West Coast Main Line and the Old Dalby Test Track (now Melton Test Track). Recently retired, with over 50 years' service for the railway, his rôle at Alstom was to mitigate risks when operational procedures are changed, particularly when a new fleet is introduced.

The modern **Widnes** facility is very flexible and could be used for train assembly for example. There is passive provision, with land ownership, for considerable expansion if necessary. The short spur shown on the 2022 TRACKmaps Book 4 p37A splitting into two is for possible future extensions or sidings.

**Ditton Sidings Ground Switch Panel** (released by **Ditton Junction Signal Box**), the associated pointwork and signalling was commissioned from 18 Jun 2017 to control rail access to the facility from **Ditton Reception Siding N°1**. With area resignalling from 1 Sep 2020, the panel was replaced by a new Shunters Control Unit, released by **Manchester Rail Operating Centre**, **Wavertree Work Station** (WE).

**2466] Salford Central:** (BLN 1465.284) (615,000 passengers in 2023-24) The station upgrade is now complete. Carried out by Story Contracting, it was on time and in budget, a happy ending to that story. The project was a collaboration between TfGM, NR and Northern. Work included: ●Replacing the roof on the upper level. ●A new ticket office. ●Accessible toilets. ●A covered walkway from the lift on P1. ●Improving the platforms and ramps. ●Better passenger information displays, such as a braille map.

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **1:** | **Carnforth Station Junction** | **11:** | **Silecroft** |
| **2:** | **Arnside** | **12:** | **Bootle** |
| **3:** | **Grange-over-Sands** | **13:** | **Drigg** |
| **4:** | **Ulverston** | **14:** | **Sellafield** |
| **5:** | **Dalton Junction** | **15:** | **St Bees** |
| **6:** | **Barrow-in-Furness** | **16:** | **Bransty** |
| **7:** | **Park South** | **17:** | **Workington Main Nº2** |
| **8:** | **Askam** | **18:** | **Workington Main Nº3** |
| **9:** | **Foxfield** | **19:** | **Maryport Station** |
| **10:** | **Millom** | **20:** | **Wigton** |

**2467] Cumbrian Coast:** BLN 1483 item 2356 reported that the **York** to **Harrogate** line now has the greatest concentration of minor boxes in the NR NE area. Nationally and in the NW Region of course, the Cumbrian Coast line now has the most, no fewer than twenty [when are our Society visits?]. **LEFT:** All are believed to have lever frames and working is mostly (but not exclusively) by Absolute Block.

**2468] Penrith:** At 13.25 on Sat 22 Nov, a train driver reported a potential track defect on the Down Main line at **Calthwaite**, between **Penrith** and **Carlisle**. A broken rail was confirmed. The rail had a clean break and dropped two inches, cracking two sleepers. Single Line Working was implemented on the Up Main between **Penrith** and **Upperby Bridge** at 16.06. The 12.04 **Manchester Airport** to **Edinburgh** TPE service was held south of **Penrith** for 161 minutes, while this was all sorted out. However, passengers were rewarded for their patience by being the only ones to grice the facing crossover at **Penrith Middle Jn** (50m 76ch) to the Up Main, returning Down at **Upperby Jn** (66m 23ch); the train was cancelled at **Carlisle** 166 min late. Other Down services were cancelled further south and, at 16.36, the Down Main reopened with the rail clamped and an emergency 20mph speed restriction. The rail was replaced overnight.

**2469] Metrolink:** ❶New data from Transport for Greater Manchester (TfGM) shows that **St Peter's Square** remains the most used Metrolink stop; nearly 4.5M passengers boarded or alighted in 2024. **Deansgate-Castlefield** and **Piccadilly Gardens** retain their positions (from 2020-21, the last time footfall figures were released) as second and third placed stations but they have swapped places since 2022. **Deansgate-Castlefield** was used by 2.1M, compared to 1.7M at **Piccadilly Gardens**. The three least used stops are all in Wythenshawe: **Robinswood Road** (23,850), **Crossacres**, (42,950) and **Peel Hall** (45,250). 45.6M journeys were made on Metrolink during 2024, compared to 40.2M in 2023 and 33.5M in 2022.

❷Trams will run until 1am on Fridays & Saturdays before Christmas, with double trams on busy nights.

❸Metrolink Drivers have voted to strike over concerns about fatigue and long working hours. Drivers say that they are required to work 450 hours over a 12-week period, including 50 hour weeks in shifts then just two days off, then back into another 50-hour in a week pattern. The union, Unite, says drivers have suffered from fatigue due to not having adequate breaks and are concerned about operating heavy passenger vehicles while exhausted. Metrolink management have responded that there is currently no funding available to change existing shift patterns which meet current regulations. The strike was initially expected to take place from Fri 5 until Sun 7 Dec, one of the busiest weekends of the year.

**2470] Greenfield and Mossley:** On 7 Nov, NR submitted a Transport and Works Act Order application to the Secretary of State for Transport for the **Stalybridge** to **Diggle** (**Saddleworth**) scheme. On the same date, NR made an application to Tameside Council and Oldham Council for listed building consents under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 in connection with the proposed works.

The TransPennine Route Upgrade team is consulting on proposals to upgrade these stations and the line. Included are: ❖Extended platforms at both stations. ❖Relocation of **Mossley** 300m northeast of the current station, towards **Huddersfield** allowing space for an improved, accessible station with a new footbridge and lifts. ❖Replacement of **Greenfield** station footbridge for overhead line electrification (OHLE) clearance by a higher one with lifts. ❖Safety and security work near the boundary where houses in **Mossley** sit close to the railway tracks. ❖Track lowering in **Stalybridge** and **Scout Tunnels** for OHLE and to run larger freight trains. ❖Reconstruction of Oldham Rd Bridge with a new footbridge between Oldham Rd and Shaw Hall Bank Rd next to the present road bridge, separating pedestrians from the road.

❖Work for OHLE is needed on: ●Heyrod Hall overbridge, ●Spring Bank Lane footbridge, ●Roughtown Rd overbridge ●Wrights Mill overbridge ●Wrights overbridge ●Royal George underbridge ●Shaw Hall Bank Rd footway ●Wickens underbridge ●Uppermill Viaduct. NR aspire to start work by Summer 2028.

**2471] Manchester Airport:** London Northwestern Railway (which enters public ownership on 1 Feb) hopes to run here for the first time from 13 Dec 2026. One in ten journeys between **Manchester** and **Euston** is already made in part on LNwR services, despite the operator not serving **Manchester** directly. This is due to low cost off peak LNwR / Northern and LNwR / TfW only return and advance fares. Some other popular value-for-money fares on LNwR routes include: ✱**Birmingham** to / from **Euston** from £9 one way (£5.95 with railcard). ✱**Liverpool** to / from **Euston** from £14 one-way (£9.30 with railcard).

**2472] Wigan Wallgate:** (BLN 1453.1828) Northern's Rail Training facility, previously reported as under construction here, was finally finished by 7 Oct when a local member observed it and took photographs.

**2473] Middlewich:** (BLN 1482.2257) A member traversed **Sandbach North Jn** to **Northwich West Jn** and return on Sat 15 Nov, which he had not done before despite having lived in **Manchester** in the 1960s. These were planned diversions on the 08.02 **Euston** to **Holyhead** and return. At **Crewe**, various enthusiasts joined and likewise at **Chester** on the return. On the Down trip along the single track **Northwich Branch**, an Up Avanti working was passed at **Middlewich** loop after a long stand. Speed on the branch was limited throughout to 20mph. **Northwich Viaduct** (between **Northwich** and **Greenbank**) is also restricted to 20mph, both roads. The interior displays on the new Hitachi 5-car Class 805 bimode from **Euston** were determined that the train was to call at **Harrow & Wealdstone** and five other stops, including in Welsh, **Milton Keynes Canalog**. Fortunately, the driver did not stop at any of them. Reservations were not displayed either and eventually the crew turned these false stops off.

**2474] Warrington BQ:** Due to power supply issues affecting points at **Winwick Jn** on 21 Nov, the 08.40 **Euston** to **Edinburgh** and 09.39 **Euston** to **Blackpool North** departed **Warrington BQ** P3 crossing to the bidirectional Up Slow at **Dallam Jn** (182m 67ch), returning to the Down Main at **Winwick Jn**. This is a very rare move for a passenger train. On the Up, the 05.33 **Coatbridge** to **Daventry**; 08.20 **Carnforth** to **Bicester** (ECS for a Pathfinder tour on 22nd) and 09.00 **Carlisle** to **Crewe** light engine, ran via **Earlestown**.

**2475] Fiddler's Ferry:** (BLN 1483.2362) The first train to the **Power Station** since 23 Apr (by George!) ran on 20 Nov. **66**155 hauled 6Z70, the 09.20 **Arpley Sidings** to **Fiddlers Ferry Power Station**, formed of 10 x HOA hoppers from **Westbury**, via South Wales. It is the fourth set of wagons in secure storage there. The loco left as 0Z76, 11.50 **Fiddler's Ferry Power Station** to **Arpley Sidings** light engine return working.

**2476] Fiddling about with a name:** (BLN 1483.2362) **Fidlers Ferry** was spelt as such in all working timetables and notices etc, which explains the spelling on the signal box. Nobody is aware of the reason for this. Conversely, locomotive **56**099 was named 'Fiddlers Ferry Power Station' (without apostrophe).

Long before the Power Station made an appearance, the OS repeatedly showed the location as **Fiddlers Ferry**. A member lived near the Power Station for 17 years and remembers it coming on stream in 1971. When the safety valve lifted on the boiler house, the local residents certainly knew about it! However, this only occurred during its early years. From 1960-71 our member had lived at **Thelwall** by the railway.

**Skelton Jn** to **Ditton Jn** was part of his life for 65 years, in the early days it was extremely busy with freight ''relentless''. He remembers steam working and the Summer Saturday **Leeds** to **Llandudno** and **Sheffield** to **Llandudno** as well as their return trains passing his house. Traffic started to decline following closure of the **Woodhead** line (20 Jul 1981) and **Skelton Jn** to **Warrington Latchford** from 8 Jul 1985.

**2477] Shap:** (BLN 1483.2369) The Rail Accident Investigation Branch (RAIB) is to hold an investigation to determine the sequence of events which led to the derailment at **Shap** on Mon 3 Nov. It will consider:

- The design, maintenance and management of earthworks and drainage in this area.
- The effectiveness of onsite monitoring equipment.
- The operational response to adverse weather warnings.
- The performance of the train during the derailment.
- Any underlying factors which might have contributed to the derailment.

**1484 SOUTH EAST - NORTH & EAST ANGLIA (Julian James)** south-east-news@branchline.uk
**Norfolk, Suffolk, Bedfordshire, Berkshire, Bucks, Cambridgeshire, Essex, Hertfordshire & Oxfordshire.**

**2478] Manningtree - Harwich:** (TRACKmaps 2 p9B 2020) **Mistley** Up Refuge Siding at 61m19ch was to be recovered and the associated ground frame abolished from 22 Nov - it has gone on 2025 TRACKmaps!

**2479] Norwich Victoria:** (OP 12 Dec 1849; CP 22 May 1916; taken OOU 28 Sep 1986) Part of the site of the former terminal station is likely to be redeveloped, replacing Victoria House on the corner of Queens Rd and St Stephens Rd with up to 432 homes in blocks of flats. There are not many remaining railway features except for the retaining wall to Victoria St and the bridge supports at Brazen Gate (southeast end of the site). There is an access gate to St Stephens Rd, which would be good to retain on site. It was an Eastern Union, then Great Eastern Railway, terminus on what became a short branch from **Trowse Upper Jn** on the main line from **London**. The planning application: https://tinyurl.com/4sue5bpz

**2480] Stowmarket - Bury St Edmunds: Thurston** (114,330 passengers in 2023-24) P1 (to **Cambridge**), on the Up Bury, is only accessible by a pedestrian barrow crossing at the **Ipswich** end. NR is considering schemes to replace the crossing with a new footbridge and lifts at the east end of the station or opening up the existing subway and installing lifts and staircases to both platforms, costed in Apr 2024 at £7.3M and £6.1M respectively. Design work may take until July 2026. Mid Suffolk Council cabinet members have voted £525,193 towards this. Approval has also been given for over 1,400 new homes in **Thurston**.

**2481] Ipswich Griffin Wharf:** (TRACKmaps 2 p7A 2025) Fri 14 Nov saw a first arrival by Freightliner Heavy Haul of aggregates, with **66**616 on the 00.54 from **Tunstead**, ultimately for Sizewell 'C'. At **Griffin Wharf** it ran onto the 'New Cut', to shunt part of the loaded train into the Brett Aggregates siding for unloading. The wagons returned the same day. A test run from **Manningtree Down Siding** (behind P3) seems to have run on Thur 13 Nov, booked to depart 04.44, actual 06.40. Previous use of **Griffin Wharf** has been infrequent, most recently on 7 Aug and 20 Jun. Another round trip from **Tunstead** ran on Fri 21 Nov.

**2482] Southend Victoria branch:** Norman Crescent and Blounts Farm footpath crossings at 34m 18ch and 34m 66ch were to be upgraded from 23 Nov, to include red/green lights using the Overlay Miniature Stop Lights (OMSL) operating system. The OMSL System is being introduced to the Anglia area at User Worked Crossings with limited sighting (particularly useful on long signal sections). This system consists of red/green lights activated by wheel sensors that operate similarly to axle counters. When they detect a train, they set the lights to red; after the train hits the strike out sensor, the lights go to green.

**2483] East West Rail:** A 19 Nov EWR reports 80 updates to plans since the last consultation including:

●**Bicester London Road Level Crossing:** The option of a single-lane underpass for cars and vans, plus a safe route for pedestrians and cyclists (previously said to be impossible at the site and too expensive).
●**Bletchley station:** A new eastern entrance to connect with the town centre.
●**Marston Vale Line:** Nine stations will be 'consolidated' into four modern, accessible stations including one at **Stewartby** for Universal Studios proposed resort (BLN 1471.1023). Stations that may close are the least used: **Fenny Stratford**, **Bow Brickhill**, **Woburn Sands**, **Aspley Guise** and **Kempston Hardwick**.
●**Tempsford:** Confirming Alignment 1c - a less disruptive route and a new station on the East Coast Main Line will be delivered five years earlier than originally planned. It crosses the ECML slightly further north, at a lower height than the other option (1b) and does not involve a lengthy viaduct, so is much cheaper.
●**Cambourne:** Relocating the station 700m west, nearer to the town centre also avoids green spaces.
●**Bourn Airfield:** A mined tunnel, instead of cut & cover, less disruptive and protects the environment.
●**Cambridge Station:** A new eastern entrance from Clifton Road.
●**Cambridge East:** Exploring a new station near Coldham's Lane to improve access and ease pressure on the City's main station (10.03M passengers in 2023-24). [Cambridge West would make it a full house.]

These follow public consultation. Government releases majored on benefits: £6.7bn of regional economic growth by 2050, 'enabling' up to 100,000 new homes and supporting tens of thousands of new jobs with train service levels increased from three or four up to five per hour. Your Regional Editor feels that the mood of existing NIMBY locals towards EWR and their ability to oppose has been misread.

**2484] Yarmouth Carriage Sidings:** (BLN 1482.2273) Contrary to our report, the 08 (**08**822) is not used to pilot the inwards loaded tarin from **Great Yarmouth** P2. Local staff on the ground advise that, this is a propelling move solely by the train loco, although the 08 needs to be towards the furthest west end of the siding that will take the wagons. After unloading, the train loco runs into the headshunt. The 08 then propels the empty wagons out onto the running line far enough to allow the train loco out of the headshunt to attach to the rear (west end) of the train, before returning to its previous location.

The train loco then propels the train back into P2 for departure. The previous misunderstanding was understandable, as the 08 has to precede the propelled loaded wagons into the unloading siding.

**1484 SOUTH EAST SOUTH (Julian James)** south-east-news@branchline.uk
**Hampshire, Isle of Wight, Kent, Surrey, East Sussex and West Sussex.**

**2485] Paddock Wood - Maidstone West**; **a tip-off:** (BLN 1470.924) (TRACKmaps 5 p8C 2024) Freight traffic has resumed to **East Peckham* Siding**, it trails into the Down Maidstone line between **Beltring** and **Yalding** at 37m 34ch; there is no crossover. Years ago, it served **East Peckham Civil Engineer's Tip**. The last rail traffic was flyash from **West Burton 'A' Power Station**, for manufacture of concrete blocks by J Clubb. This began on 15 Oct 2015 and is thought to have ended in 2017. On Wed 26 Nov 2025, what was said to be the first train to **East Peckham Siding** for 8 years ran. **66**702 worked 6Z18, the 04.48 from **Drax Power Station** with flyash, arriving 14.40. This new GBRf flow is anticipated to develop to twice a week. (***East Peckham** is a village in Kent, north of **Paddock Wood**, west of and adjoining **Branbridges**.)

| | |
|---|---|
| ***Chiltern*** | Monks Risborough |
| Aylesbury | Princes Risborough |
| Aylesbury Vale Parkway | Saunderton |
| Great Missenden | Stoke Mandeville |
| Little Kimble | Wendover |
| ***Greater Anglia*** | |
| Beaulieu Park | Rayleigh |
| Billericay | Rochford |
| Bishop's Stortford | Roydon |
| Chelmsford | Sawbridgeworth |
| Harlow Mill | Southend Victoria |
| Harlow Town | Stansted Airport |
| Hatfield Peverel | Stansted Mountfitchet |
| Hockley | Southend Airport |
| Ingatestone | Wickford |
| Prittlewell | Witham |
| ***Great Northern*** | Letchworth Garden City |
| Baldock | Stevenage |
| Hitchin | Watton-at-Stone |
| Knebworth | Welwyn North |
| ***Southern*** | Hurst Green |
| Ashtead | Leatherhead |
| Box Hill & Westhumble | Lingfield |
| Dorking (Main) | Oxted |
| Dormans | Reigate |
| East Grinstead | Woldingham |
| ***Thameslink*** | Leagrave |
| Harlington | Luton |

**2486] Stay in contact by rail:** Fifty stations are being added to contactless fares from the start of the new timetable on 14 Dec. **LEFT:** The additional stations on Chiltern, Greater Anglia and GTR.

**2487] Channel Tunnel:** The operator of the Channel Tunnel has halted millions of pounds of planned rail investments in Britain and warned of higher fares in response to a possible tripling in its Business Rates bill, currently £22M but which may rise to £65M by 2028. Eurotunnel, part of France's Getlink, said that it has been informed by the Valuation Office Agency that it planned to increase its rateable value by 200%. Eurotunnel said it was in 'deep disagreement' with the planned increase, which it considered to be 'unjustified and confiscatory in nature'. 'At a marginal tax rate of 75% on new investment, any new investment would now be loss making. Eurotunnel has therefore frozen all new railway investments in the UK.'

Eurotunnel had planned to invest £15M in two freight projects: reopening a terminal in **Barking** and running a new direct freight service from **Lille**. Both have now been halted. Eurotunnel passes much of its Business Rate costs on to train operator Eurostar, which is likely to increase fares as a result. Eurostar, majority owned by SNCF, said that 'a three-fold increase in Business Rates for Channel Tunnel users for the second time would be at odds with the government's ambition of economic growth, pioneering European rail connectivity, and encouraging low-carbon rail travel'. A Valuation Office Agency spokesman said:

'The VOA is responsible for non-domestic valuations which reflect changes in the property market. All valuations are carried out by experienced professionals in accordance with industry best practice and legal requirements. The VOA does not determine Business Rates and next year's liability has not yet been confirmed. We have engaged with Getlink and their advisers on multiple occasions over the past 18 months to discuss their valuation and fully explain our approach. These discussions remain ongoing, and we are committed to continuing constructive engagement.' A government spokesperson said: 'Business Rates valuations are set independently by the Valuation Office Agency.

The Government recognises the concerns raised and provides targeted support for businesses facing the largest revaluation increases'. Gatwick Airport has also said that future investments, including its second runway, could be jeopardised by a potential 300% increase in its Business Rates bill.

**1484 SOUTH WEST (Samuel Taunton)** south-west-news@branchline.uk
**Avon, Cornwall, Devon, Dorset, Gloucestershire, Lundy, Somerset, Wiltshire and the Channel Islands.**

**2488] Totnes:** On Fri 28 Nov, due to a shortage of serviceable IETs, the 05.55 **Bristol TM** to **Plymouth** was cancelled to **Exeter St Davids**. It started there as a Class 150 which, most unusually, took the facing crossover at **Totnes East** (222m 39ch), to terminate in **Totnes** Up P2. It then became the 05.40 **Penzance** to **Exeter** which had been cancelled from **Penzance** due to ……. a shortage of serviceable IETs. How are they going to manage from 14 Dec with all HSTs withdrawn and Class 175 DMUs not yet in service then?

**2489] HSTs - the end:** The final day of GWR HST operation is Sat 13 Dec, the diagrams from WNXX Forum: ✖05.15 & 10.15 **Plymouth** to **Penzance** (arr 07.07 / 12.11) and 07.40 / 13.15 return (**Plymouth** arr 09.37 & 15.09). ✖08.00 **Exeter** to **Penzance** (arr 11.12) and 11.50 **Penzance** to **Plymouth** (13.53), 14.43 to **Penzance** (16.44) and 17.15 return (**Plymouth** 19.10). ✖12.41 **Plymouth** to **Penzance** (14.40) and 15.15 return. ✖15.16 **Plymouth** to **Penzance** (16.54) & 17.32 return (**Plymouth** 19.17) - these two are charters for special ticket holders only. At **Plymouth**, a line up of three HSTs is planned between 19.17 and 19.37.

**2490] Looe branch, many cuts:** Trains are replaced by buses from Mon 8 until Fri 19 Dec, for trees and bushes to be cut back but it will improve the view. Buses do not serve **Coombe Junction Halt**; taxis are provided on request to GWR. There is another branch closure from Mon 23 Feb until Fri 6 Mar for further work. There is no winter Sunday service after 26 Oct 2025 (last day), until it restarts on Sun 5 Apr 2026.

**2491] Truro:** (TRACKmaps 3 p11A) On Tue 25 Nov, the 13.45 **Truro** to **Falmouth** was cancelled; the DMU remaining in Bay P1. As a result, the 13.45 from **Falmouth** had to run into P2. This resulted in the 10.03 **Paddington** to **Penzance** taking the facing crossover before **Truro** to call at bidirectional, normally Up, P3 then return to the Down Main via the trailing crossover after the station at 301m 2ch. This crossover is only used by the SO 06.04 **Truro** P3 to **Falmouth** and, in the other direction, the 19.41 SuX **Falmouth Docks** to **Par** (P3 SO). After the latter, the evening **Falmouth** branch service reduces to hourly. Oddly, the 11.27 **Exeter** to **Penzance** HST also called at **Truro** P3 on 25 Nov, maybe to check the signalling route?

During the 1-5 Dec **Truro** to **Penzance** and **St Ives** branch closure, trains from **Plymouth** turned back in **Truro** P3, using the facing crossover on arrival. Near **Redruth**, 1,200 yards of new track, sleepers and ballast was installed, including across the Grade II-listed **Redruth Viaduct**. Near **Camborne**, 300yd of track was also replaced and track equipment was upgraded near **Penzance** and **St Erth**.

**2492] Breathing in the West Somerset Railway:** The Railway 200 (**NOT** Rail 200!) 'Inspiration' train was at **Bishops Lydeard** from Mon 24 until Sat 29 Nov. On Tue 25 & Fri 28 Nov only, GWR ran a Class 150 DMU shuttle to connect from **Taunton** (5¼ miles) at 10.05, 11.20, 13.50 & 15.05, returning at 10.50, 11.55, 14.25 & 15.40 from **Bishops Lydeard**. Travel was free to those with Inspiration tickets (also free).

**2493] Patchway - Pilning:** (TRACKmaps 3 p18A & 19B 2023) On Sat 22 Nov, there was a points failure at **Patchway Jn N°2** (5m 61ch). From 17.10 until close of service, Down trains from **Bristol Parkway** towards South Wales crossed to the bidirectional Up Tunnel line at this junction (a common crossover in the other direction), returning to the Down Tunnel after **Pilning** at 10m 47ch. Trains from **Filton Abbey Wood** towards South Wales were only affected from 17.10 until 17.47, then ran on the Down Tunnel again.

**2494] Newquay:** (BLN 1483.2385) The new signalling was signed into use at 18.00 on 17 Nov. However, problems have been reported and, at least at reopening on 18 Nov (nine days late), the new Goss Moor passing loop was not commissioned. Instead, One Train Working was in force between **Goonbarrow Junction** and **Newquay**. The loop is not needed for the current service, although some trains have since been reported as running through the loop sporadically to test signalling / routes. Reinstated **Newquay** P2 (right-hand on arrival) is now the preferred one, as correctly shown by Realtime Trains (RTT). The two hourly passenger service is supposed to go hourly in 'Spring 2026'. It is shown in RTT as two hourly until 4 Apr 2026 (Good Friday). Thereafter, only two round trips a day are currently visible! With HSTs going from 14 Dec and Class 175s not yet in service, 5 Apr seems a plausible date for the new hourly service.

**2495] Liskeard:** On the morning of Sun 7 Dec, the 09.53, 10.27 & 11.01 (only) **Liskeard** to **Penzance** are booked to start from P2 and use the Country end trailing crossover in service on departure.

**2496] Wi-F1 - Keep an eye out for 802**101**:** This GWR 9-car IET is the first train to be fitted with the 'next generation' enhanced 'superfast' Wi-Fi, as used on F1 racing cars (which travel at similar/faster speeds). This is a two month trial from 17 Nov. **802**101 has also been fitted with unmissable bright orange stickers. The DfT is attempting to eliminate mobile signal blackspots such as in the 2½ mile **Chipping Sodbury Tunnel**. WiFi is also being enhanced at **Paddington** and **Bristol Temple Meads** stations. The DfT has secured £41M to introduce 'low-earth-orbit satellite connectivity' on all main line trains* by 2030 to greatly improve availability and internet data connection speeds for Wi-Fi. *Is Open Access included?

## 1484 WEST MIDLANDS (Brian Schindler) west-midlands-news@branchline.uk

**Herefordshire, Shropshire, Staffordshire, Warwickshire, West Midlands, Worcestershire & Malvern.**

**2497] West Midlands Metro:** ❶(BLN 1480.2145) Services resumed at **Wolverhampton St George's** from 17 Nov; they had been temporarily withdrawn from 19 Oct. This is expected to be permanent ahead of the opening of Phase 1 of the Eastside extension to **Millennium Point**. The new schedule:

Mondays - Saturdays: Start of service until 07.00 and from 19.00 to end of service, every 15mins between **Wolverhampton Station** and **Edgbaston Village**; no service at **St George's**. 07.00-19.00 every 15mins **St George's** to **Edgbaston Village** and every 15mins **Wolverhampton Station** to **Edgbaston Village**. In combination, **The Royal** to **Edgbaston Village** has trams on average every 7½ minutes.

Sundays: Every 12mins **Wolverhampton Station** to **Edgbaston Village** only. No trams at **St George's**. There are further changes now that driver training has started to **Millenium Point**. Passengers are ''asked'' (quote), on some services, to alight from trams at **Bull Street** in both directions to allow drivers to learn the extension ECS. [Can we "ask" to stay on?] The trams re-enter service at **Corporation Street**.

❷From the New Year, the penalty fare for travelling without a valid ticket on WM Metro increases from £10 to £100. The change is supposedly to bring it in line with other transport systems across the UK and to ensure ''fairness'' for all passengers but on Manchester Metrolink it is currently £120. **Edinburgh Trams** now charge anyone found on a tram without a ticket £10 for their journey but has the power to impose a penalty fare of 25 times the maximum single adult cash fare - so, in theory, £250. The penalty fare on trams in **Nottingham** and **Sheffield** is £70. On **London Trams** (**Croydon**) it is £100, reduced to £50 if paid within 21 days. **Blackpool** does not have penalty fares; ordinary tickets can be purchased on trams at the normal price these days (they used to be dearer than those bought at local shops or online).

❸WM Metro fares will be increased in the new year, described as 'modest' but some go up by 10%. They say that the rise is needed to ensure the financial sustainability of the network (they made a generous pay award last year). From an unspecified date in early January, single tickets go up by between 20p and 50p, with all day tickets increasing between 30p and 70p (depending on zone/s). Season go up by 10%. Examples of new fares include a Zone 1 single ticket which will now be £2.50 (currently £2.30), while a Zone 1-2 ticket will be £3.50 (was £3.20) for a Single and £5.20 (was £4.70) for a Peak All Day Ticket. It will be interesting to see what happens to PlusBus tickets, which are also Peak All Day Tickets.

**2498] Sheep may safely graze:** (BLN 1481.2180) NR has now explained the reason for this rather bizarre event. Environmental teams are working next to **Harbury Tunnel** to restore a rare habitat by deploying a flock of sheep. The area was subject to a serious landslip in Feb 2015, damaging the ground beside the railway impacting a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), which is frequented by an unspecified variety of rare butterfly. NR has carried out extensive work to restore the cutting and the habitat of the SSSI, by planting a seed mix of meadow grasses and wildflowers favoured by pollinating insects.

However, the steep location of this habitat rules out lawn mowers to prevent tree growth, which encroaches on the butterfly habitat. NR has teamed up with Butterfly Conservation and a local farmer to move a flock of sheep onto the land to spend the winter on the cutting, grazing down competitive grasses and weeds, giving the best possible chance for the pollinators to thrive again come the spring. Will trains be rammed? A senior Society member commented: *Wish they'd get on and (a) protect the railway from landslips, and (b) cut down the buddleia and other boscage that is invading the railway...*

# AUSTIN ROVER LONGBRIDGE

NOT TO SCALE

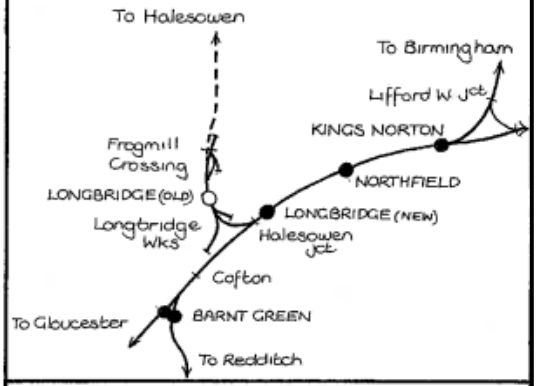
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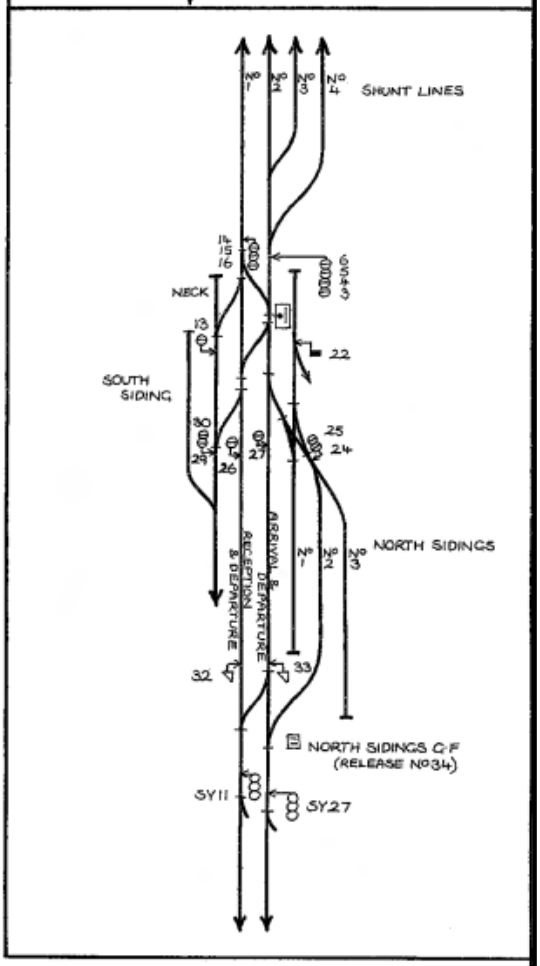
**-KEY-**

= Line, in use, or in situ.
= Course of former line.
= Point, remotely operated.
(All others are hand operated)
= Colour Light Signal.
= Semaphore Signal.
= Semaphore Disc Signal.

RMW 7/8/93

## LOCATION MAP



**2499] PREVIOUS - Longbridge:** (BLN 1483. 2390) Track plan thanks to Rodger Wilkinson, drawn after our Society internal trip of 8 May 1993. See back reference regarding the true location of **Frogmill Crossing**.

**2500] Birmingham International:** A member asked Caledonian Sleeper why only the Highland Sleeper runs via, and calls at, **International**. He was advised that it is due to there already being plenty of day services to/from **Edinburgh** and **Glasgow** but there are none that go to the Highlands, so it is based on demand. It needs to be said that the Lowlander between **Euston** and **Glasgow**/**Edinburgh** normally runs via the Trent Valley, even if it ran via **Birmingham International** the timings would be very inconvenient.

Many overnight services ceased, because daytime journey times by train became shorter and the budget airlines took traffic. **Glasgow** to **Birmingham** is now just over 4 hours, with the first through train arriving at 10.06. [Looking at the 1975 timetable, it is extraordinary how many sleeper trains there were then.]

**2501] HS2:** The postponed Curzon Viaduct installation is being rearranged. The Viaduct was not ready for the line closure from 26 Jul until 3 Aug (which still went ahead as it was past the point of no return). The Viaduct was incomplete due to a national shortage of skilled welders. The potential date is a 3-day possession from **Proof House Jn - Aston South Jn** from 00.01 29 May to 05.00 on 1 Jun. The Spring Bank Holiday was rejected due to Birmingham Pride but the new date includes Half Term Friday. HS2 has a 54 hour Coventry Corridor block then, so it would be expedient to have both blockades at the same time.

**2502] West Midlands Trains:** The ORR has reported 12% passenger growth on West Midlands Railway and London Northwestern Railway during the first quarter of 2025-26 compared with 2024-25, an extra two million journeys. The two operators carried 67.7M passengers during 2024-25 and this is expected to rise to 80M during 2025-26. The increase is attributed to additional LNwR services from Dec 2024, the introduction of two new train fleets and increased leisure travel, particularly at weekends. The figures put the combined companies in the top five nationally for passenger growth.

**2503] Grange Jn:** (TRACKmaps 4 p42A 2022) On the Up side between **Longport** and **Stoke-on-Trent**, from about 18m 25ch to 18m 54ch, DBC's **Granville Sidings** Roads 1-8 and Shunt Lines 1 & 2 (also shown on TRACKmaps as the former **West Coast Mainline Project Depot**) have now been taken out of use until further notice. They had been used by On Track Machines recently but are not patrolled or maintained. The line to the former **Shelton** (Steel) **Works** was the start of the North Staffordshire Railway **Grange Colliery Branch**. Steel production at **Shelton Bar** ended in 1978 and the rolling mills closed 27 Apr 2002.

## 1484 IRELAND (Martin Baumann) ireland-news@branchline.uk

**2504] Athenry - Tuam - Claremorris:** (Baker Atlas 16 p107 C2) Reopening this northern extension of the Western Corridor is prioritised in the transport development plan published by the Irish Government on 26 Nov. Initial enabling works, including de-vegetation, extensive clearance works and fencing the route, will begin early in the New Year of 2026 and continue for up to a year and a half. Planning and design for the new railway will also be undertaken with procurement in 2027. The main construction works will be under way by 2028 and Minister Sean Canny has confirmed that the project will be completed by 2030.

EU funding will also support the project. However, there is no spare rolling stock to operate a service. The points were removed at **Athenry** on 13 Nov 2002 but most track is in situ. The last traffic was **Foynes** to **Ballina** coal trains for the Asahi plant at **Ballina** (when not diverted via **Portarlington** due to flooding between **Limerick** and **Ennis**). This plant closed in Nov/Dec 1997. The last revenue freight traffic ran on 8 May 1999, the last movement on the line was the weedspraying train in both directions 4 May 2001.

There were stations at **Ballyglunin** (CP 1976) **Tuam** (CP 1976), **Castlegrove** (CP 1963), **Milltown** (CP 1963), **Ballindine** (CP 1963) and **Claremorris South** (CP 1895). Regular passenger services were withdrawn from 5 Apr 1976 (also on the **Limerick** to **Athenry** line), when the one train a day between **Limerick** and **Ballina** ended with passenger closure of **Ballyglunin** and **Tuam**. The route then became a ***PSUL*** with up to four SuO Knock Pilgrimage special paths. Some came from exotic places such as **Youghal**, **New Ross**, the **North Kerry** line, **Bantry** and **Baltimore**. They diminished over the years and were last mentioned in 1989-90 ***PSUL***. BLN 698.63 reports that the final Knock special via **Athenry** to **Claremorris** ran on 8 Sep 1991. The last railtour was the 8 Apr 1995 Irish Traction Group 'Tuam Freight-Liner'.

**2505] NIR Dec timetable:** The current timetable has been extended for 12 months until 13 Dec 2026.

**2506] Short termism:** At present, Translink is set an annual budget which has to be renegotiated each year. The initial allocation Translink was provided with for the 2024-25 financial year was £145.7M. In Oct 2024, an additional £6.85M of funding was provided, along with an internal transfer of £300,000, bringing the budget allocation to £152.85M. In Apr 2025, the Northern Ireland Department for Infrastructure allocated indicative capital funding of £235M for 2025-26, which was not confirmed until Oct. This is well below the £260M projected requirement; note this covers NIR, Citybus and Ulsterbus.

On 6 Oct, Translink's Director of Infrastructure & Projects called for three year budgets to provide some certainty and continuity. It has been estimated that this could result in 20% efficiency savings compared with annual budgets. The Director pointed out that Network Rail has five year budgets. The underlying problem is said to be the current instability of Stormont Government and its £780M 'overcommitments'.

**2507] Luas is no longer pointless:** (BLN 1478.1873) Luas, the Dublin tram system, reopened the red line between **Busáras** and **The Point** on Fri 28 Nov. It closed on the evening of Tue 19 Aug following fire damage to George's Dock bridge, which has had to be replaced, including cables and the OHLE.

**2508] Omagh:** On 24 Nov 1950, five P'Way staff were killed by a train at **Omagh** station. There was heavy fog and their view was restricted by another train already in the station. On the 75th anniversary of the accident a memorial was dedicated on the site of the Station Master's house, including a short section of track: https://tinyurl.com/ywm72ha2 The station site is occupied by a dual carriageway now.

**2509] Belfast**; **Central Jn - City Jn:** A member writes: A word of advice if anyone is thinking of catching the extra football train from **Lisburn** (via **Grand Central** avoiding line) when there is a Northern Ireland international football match on. Don't! On Mon 17 Nov, despite showing in the Translink journey planner from **Lisburn**, it left P3 **not** in service to **Adelaide**. It then entered service and promptly did the rare track.

**2510] Irish Railways Line by Line Vol 4; Northern Ireland Railways** (**1968-2011**)**:** By Jim Edgar, softback, 64 pages, 25 x 18cm, 133 colour photos, 22 monochrome, three diagrams. Just out (Markle Associates Publishing). This is an excellent selection of photos showing NIR operations in those years. Photo reproduction is mostly excellent and each picture is accompanied by an informative caption which, apart from one wrong date and a misidentified engineering vehicle, give accurate details of what is illustrated.

It concentrates mainly on the period 1975 to 2000, when the network was undergoing great change during difficult times. **Adelaide** steam shed had been transformed into a freight depot and **Londonderry** was still receiving freight trains from **Dublin**. The former Belfast Central Railway was reborn and the new **Belfast Central** station was opened. Locomotives pictured include the NIR classes DH, DL (Hunslet), MV, GM (later 111) and 201 plus CIÉ classes 001, 121, 141, 181 & 201. Railcars include NIR classes BUT, MED, MPD, DE (later 70 class), 80, 450 and the unique NIR Railbus. Although principally shot in diesel days, there are photos of NIR N°27 'Lough Erne', WT class N°5 and the Londonderry Port & Harbour Commissioners loco N°3. If you have not heard of the 'Goraghwood Deviation', you must buy this book. (It's been in BLN!) Highly recommended. RRP £14.50/€17; from the RPSI: https://tinyurl.com/csd66azd

**2511] CAF v Stadler:** (BLN 1482.2300) The CAF (Construcciones y Auxiliar de Ferrocarriles) challenge was rejected in court, so Stadler will be building the new trains for the **Belfast** to **Dublin** 'Enterprise' services.

**2512] Downpatrick & County Down Railway:** (MR p10) On 14 Nov, the 40th anniversary of the Railway, it was announced that this 5' 3" gauge heritage railway in Northern Ireland has received the King's Award for Voluntary Service 2025. This is the UK's highest honour for a volunteer-run organisation.

## 1484 ISLE OF MAN (Cade Williamson) iom-news@branchline.uk

**2513] Isle of Man Steam Packet Company:** From 1 Apr 2026, regular direct sailings will operate from **Douglas** to **Larne** (4½ hours), no fooling, with five sailings a week in the peak season and three off-peak. From 24 May, there will also be regular sailings to **Dublin** (3¼ hours). Schedules, times and fares are on the website, with bookings now open until 15 May 2027. A successful trial run was made to **Larne** recently and it is intended to use the former flagship Ben-my-Chree on these sailings to Ireland.

They are on a 'use it or lose it basis' for two years, with continuation subject to commercial success. With the regular **Heysham** sailings and the **Liverpool** crossings, it is said to be the first time in over 15 years that the IOM has had regular schedules operated by three vessels outside the TT period.

**2514] Situation Vacant:** A rare chance to join the team at IOM Railways, helping to maintain rolling stock on the MER, has been advertised; an Electrical/Mechanical Rolling Stock Fitter is wanted. Based at **Laxey**, it involves inspection, maintenance and repair of high-voltage electrical and mechanical systems across the Island's iconic rolling stock. The successful person will have a key rôle in ensuring the continued safety, reliability and performance of the much-loved heritage assets. 37 hours per week, Salary £27,598-£33,290 per year, closing date 2 Jan. Details at: https://tinyurl.com/58edwarx

**2515] The Mountain Railway goes wireless:** On Tue 25 Nov, a lovely clear day, the OHLE was taken into protective custody on the top section (**Bungalow** to **Summit**). A tram took the tower wagon to **Bungalow**. Then, as the OHLE wasn't live thereafter (for obvious reasons), the tower wagon was attached to the tractor and propelled up the mountain. This annual time-honoured ceremony protects the wires from the harsh conditions experienced up on the mountain during the winter months.

**2516] Manx Electric Railway:** The MER last carried mail on Sun 2 Nov 1975, the last day of service that year. To commemorate the 50th anniversary of this event, trams pulled restored MER mail vans on Sun 2 Nov 2025 - also the last day of the season. All three restored vans (Nos 4, which is bright red, 11 and 16) were used; the fourth one (No 3) is currently undergoing restoration with no time frame. Years ago, mail traffic was once a significant contract for the MER. The post was bagged and tram conductors were sworn in as Postmen so they could open post boxes *en route* and collect the mail.

## 1484 SCOTLAND (Greg Beecroft) scotland-news@branchline.uk

**2517] Stranraer: Ayr** to **Stranraer** is closed from the end of service on Fri 28 Nov until Mon 8 Dec start of service. During this period, over £1M will be spent on flood prevention work and upgrading **Markdhu No1 Level Crossing** (between **Barrhill** and **Glenwhilly**). The opportunity will be taken to inspect structures and embankments. The line is not heavily used, particularly south of **Girvan**, where there were 31,866 passenger journeys recorded to and from **Stranraer** in 2023-24 and just 3,874 at **Barrhill**. NR says it is committed to 'improving the long-term resilience and reliability of the route, helping ensure it remains a trusted transport connection for the southwest'. This is a most welcome statement but the line is costly to operate. The regular timetable does not require more than one train to be south of **Girvan** but there are staffed signal boxes at **Barrhill**, **Glenwhilly** and **Dunragit**, with the last having a manually operated level crossing. Despite no trains being scheduled to cross there, the loop at **Glenwhilly** (BLN 1475.1545), which had been out of use since 24 Mar 2025, was reinstated on 26 Oct. There was some difficulty in procuring components for the damaged points, because they are to an obsolete, bullhead design. London Underground, which still makes significant use of bullhead rail in points, was able to assist.

**Stranraer** box only opens if special traffic requires this. The train is over half an hour faster than the bus from **Ayr** but much of this advantage is lost by **Stranraer** station being at the closed ferry port. That may not matter much to those who drive to the station but it is a bleak walk to the town centre.

**2518] Winchburgh:** On 17 Nov, West Lothian Council submitted a funding request for **Winchburgh** railway station to the Scottish Government. It is envisaged that finance will come through the City Region Deal, which supports housing development in the area, with a contribution from the developer.

**2519] Rolling Stock Strategy:** Transport Scotland has issued an updated rolling stock strategy, which largely confirms previous plans. Key points are:

- Procurement of trains to replace the Inter7City HSTs is under way, with two options identified. These are lower emission diesel trains redeployed from elsewhere in Great Britain (widely believed to be class 222 Meridians displaced from the Midland Main Line by Class 810) or new bimode electro-diesel trains.

- (BLN 1483.2402) Procurement has also started for a suburban train fleet to work in the **Glasgow** area, **Fife** and on **Borders Railway** services. The **Fife** and **Borders** units will release Class 158 and 170 units to replace Class 156s, which work **West Highland Line** and services between **Glasgow** and **Carlisle** via **Kilmarnock**, also between **Kilmarnock**, **Ayr**, **Girvan** and **Stranraer**. This should also end the few residual Class 158 workings on the **Shotts** line that transfer units between **Corkerhill Depot** and **Edinburgh**.

- Independently powered trains will be needed for non-electrified rural routes. Transport Scotland says that both battery-only and hydrogen-powered trains are still technically and commercially immature and time is needed to allow the supply chain to scale up before these can be deployed on the network.

**2520] Edinburgh:** (TRACKmaps 1 p11A 2021) A member catching the 15.50 SO **Edinburgh** to **Glasgow Central** via **Carstairs** found that it is scheduled to depart from the least likely platform, P1 at the northeast corner of the station. Departure was via the crossover to P19, Line 'Z' and across the entire layout from the Up North Line to the Down South Line at Princes Street Gardens. The train still uses P1 in the Dec timetable. The inward working is the 13.40 SO from **Glasgow Central** via **Carstairs**. The Highland Sleeper uses the Princes Street crossovers and Line 'Z' in both directions, except for the southbound **Aberdeen** portion on arrival. Almost all trains via line 'Z' use the North Lines through **Haymarket** but others scheduled to cross to or from the South Lines at Princes Street Gardens (from 14 Dec 2025) include:

07.12 SSuX **Dunblane** to **Edinburgh** (P1), 09.39 SuO **Edinburgh** (P20) to **Helensburgh Central**, 09.25 SuO **Helensburgh Central** to **Edinburgh** (P19) and 18.16 SuO **Glasgow Central** to **Edinburgh** (P20) via **Shotts**. Various other trains via **Edinburgh Park** cross to or from the North Lines at **Haymarket Central Jn**.

**2521] Edinburgh Trams:** Flooding in Princes Street for part of the day on Sun 23 Nov caused tram services to be suspended between **West End** and **Picardy Place**. The usual arrangements, which can also be expected from 20.00 on 31 Dec during the Hogmanay street party, are for trams to shunt empty via the crossover at **Picardy Place** but they use the **West End** crossover in passenger service on departure east.

**2522] Glenrothes with Thornton:** (BLN 1463.108) Fife Council's Glenrothes Area Committee has given its backing to a proposal by Thornton Community Council that **Glenrothes with Thornton** station should be renamed **Thornton**. The station is located in **Thornton** and further from **Glenrothes** than **Markinch**, which has much better bus connections to the town. An online petition in support of the change has attracted 952 signatures, equivalent to almost half the population of **Thornton**. Network Rail generally opposes changes to station names, because of the cost of amending records, IT systems etc.

**2523] Fife Electrification:** Almost all electrification masts, with register arms, have been erected on the **Leven** branch. The mast bases were installed before the line reopened. Masts and register arms are also erected from **Haymarket** to just short of **Dalmeny** and some lengths of return conductor cable have been installed. NR has applied to Fife Council for design approval of various bridges that need to be altered for electrification. This includes some in the **Cupar** area, though it was previously reported that electrification would initially extend only to **Ladybank**. A new feeder station is to be provided at **Thornton**. It is intended that battery electric trains will operate via **Ladybank** to both **Perth** and **Dundee**.

**2524] Dec Timetable:** ScotRail changes include additional evening services on the **East Kilbride** line and between **Edinburgh** and **Dunblane**, providing two trains an hour Mon to Sat in both cases. There are additional morning peak trains to **Edinburgh** at 07.41 from **Dunbar** and 08.19 from **North Berwick**. Various timing adjustments to both services are required to fit in with the new ECML timetable. Some evening trains to **Dunbar** will stop additionally at **Prestonpans**, **Longniddry** and **Drem**. To facilitate electrification work, some late evening trains run via **Dunfermline** instead of **Kirkcaldy** Mon to Thur. Curious stopping patterns make them of no use to **Dunfermline** and **Cowdenbeath** passengers, thus:

- 1L35 23.00 **Edinburgh** to **Dundee**, non-stop **Inverkeithing** to **Glenrothes with Thornton**
- 2K85 23.05 **Edinburgh** to **Leven**, non-stop **Inverkeithing** to **Cameron Bridge**
- 2K86 23.17 **Leven** to **Edinburgh**, non-stop **Glenrothes with Thornton** to **Inverkeithing**
- 1L98 23.11 **Perth** to **Edinburgh**, non-stop **Markinch** to **Inverkeithing**

## 1484 WALES & THE MARCHES (Chris Parker) wales-news@branchline.uk

**Wales, all of the Central Wales line, Chester / Bidston - Shotton and Chester - Hereford - Newport.**

**2525] Taffs Well:** (BLN 1460.2774) The South Wales Metro tram-train depot was officially opened by HM King Charles III during Storm Claudia on 14 Nov, his 77th birthday. He met with staff at the depot and also griced some new track (presumably within depot limits) in the cab of a Class 398 tram-train.

The King unveiled a plaque which names it 'Walnut Tree Depot' - this has numerous historic associations and is said to have been chosen in consultation with the local community. TRACKmaps 3 p27A 2023 and the Sectional Appendix show it as **Taffs Well Depot**. On 22 Jun 1863, the station OP as **Walnut Tree Jn**, it was renamed **Walnut Tree Bridge** on 1 Jun 1886 and did not gain its current name until 16 Mar 1900. Children from three local schools and community representatives also joined in the damp celebrations.

**2526] Newport Docks, it's a wind-up:** (BLN 1481.2206; TRACKmaps 3 p20A 2023) The reprieve for traffic on the full length of the western docks branch may prove to have been short lived. On 25 Nov a winding-up order was made against Unimetals Recycling (UK) Ltd, with the Official Receiver appointed as liquidator. The company stated that, despite substantial interest and attempts at completing a deal, no potential buyers or investors had been identified. The train from **Wimbledon** on 12 Nov 2025 and light engine back to **Wembley** may be the last. On Fri 28 Nov, an 09.51 **Alexandra Dock Up Down Goods Loop** to **Derby Litchurch Lane** train took stock intended to be scrapped at Unimetals into storage instead.

On Mon 1 Dec, 2x4 car Class 455 EMUs were similarly taken from **Wimbledon** Depot to **Litchurch Lane** for storage instead of going to **Newport Docks.** However, the unrelated aggregate loading on the branch reported in BLN 1475.1558 was repeated exactly three months later on 15 Aug, then four times in Oct and on 11, 17 & 24 Nov, so may well continue. The location is just south of the A48 overbridge, approx grid reference ST 312 857, as seen by our keen member driving past on his way to or from Fort William!

**2527] TfW timetable:** ① (BLN 1476.1672) The extra early morning and late evening SuX services from 14 Dec are: ➤05.54 **Bidston** to **Wrexham General** and ➤20.51 **Wrexham Central** to **Bidston** (taking the paths of existing ECS workings but the ECSs are retimed rather than replaced) ➤23.23 **Cardiff Central** to **Hereford**. ➤The existing 22.15 **Cardiff** to **Hereford** is extended to **Shrewsbury** (BLN 1483.2412).

②**Leaf fall:** (BLN 1482.2280) Further SuX service reductions from 18 Oct until 28 Nov to allow for seasonal speed restrictions were ✂**Marches line:** Three daily calls omitted at **Church Stretton**, two at **Craven Arms** and two at **Ludlow**. ✂**Colwyn Bay** and **Flint:** Calls by 10.38 **Holyhead** to **Cardiff** omitted. ✂**Gowerton:** Call by 17.02 **Pembroke Dock** to **Cardiff** omitted. ✂**Wrexham - Bidston:** Four services each way cut back from **Wrexham Central** to **General** - with replacement buses, journey time 7min!

As with the BLN 1482 **Cheltenham** cuts, all these station 'non-stops' did not apply Sats 15 & 22 Nov due to rugby international matches in **Cardiff**. ✂**Conwy Valley:** The 11.37, 14.39 and 17.35 from **Blaenau Ffestiniog** were retimed 5 min earlier and arrivals into **Blaenau Ffestiniog** were booked slightly later.

③ **TfW timetables** (as with most others, no longer produced in hard copy) for the period 14 Dec 2025 to 16 May 2026 are available to download and/or print at https://tfw.wales/service-status/timetables

**2528] Cogan:** (284,000 passengers 2023-24) TfW is considering potential improvements to the station and surrounding area. The project is in its early stages with no decisions or funding yet confirmed, but details of an online survey for station users and drop-in event on 2 Dec are at: https://bit.ly/3LGSHOe

**2529] Storm Claudia: ¶Hereford** (excl) to **Maindee Jns** was closed at 14.00 on Fri 14 Nov because the River Monnow flood waters were rising at the traditional Vineyard Farm trouble spot south of **Pontrilas** (TRACKmaps 3 p30B 2023). Fortunately, the farmer, no doubt accustomed to such events, was closely monitoring the position, The last train through was TfW 12.53 **Cardiff Central** to **Manchester**, which cleared **Pontrilas** at 13.52. By 07.42 next morning, the farmer advised the **Pontrilas** signaller of a washout 10-15m long, leaving track suspended in mid-air on the Down (southbound) side. The void was later found to be 7-8 feet deep and at one of the level crossings (probably N°2 at 15m 45ch, closer to the river bridge), an obvious weak point gap in the rock armour installed here in 2021 (BLN 1390.3173).

The river reached its highest level ever recorded; repairs required more ballast than expected (about 600 tonnes); local road flooding added to access difficulties. Several rock armour boulders were moved by the force of the water but did prevent much worse damage and a likely 3-4 week closure. ROA was from start of service Tue 18 Nov, initially with a 20mph temporary speed restriction at the washout site.

¶The **Central Wales** line was closed north of **Llandrindod** on 14 & 15 Nov and (for no obvious reason) no WMR services ran between **Worcester** and **Hereford** on Fri 14th, despite some GWR services running. ¶Services north of **Hereford** were suspended from early evening 14 Nov until a limited service to/from **Shrewsbury** resumed mid-afternoon next day, extended to/from **Manchester** on 16th & 17th; **Holyhead** services only ran north of **Shrewsbury**. This was not believed to be due to any flood damage but to deter passengers from being stranded at **Hereford**. ¶The **Conwy Valley** line also seems to have benefited from previous flood defence measures. It closed south of **Llanrwst North** after the passage of the 08.35 from **Blaenau Ffestiniog** on 14 Nov and throughout from mid-afternoon but evidently remained unscathed; it ROP on 16 Nov with full service although the first one from **Llandudno** turned back at **Llanrwst North**.

**2530] Central Wales line:** BLN 1424.1308 observed that user worked level crossings present particular problems on this and other rural railway lines with long block sections and, of course, without full track circuiting. Authorised users often face long waits to cross because once a train has entered the section, the signaller has no accurate knowledge of its location and can only advise the user not to cross until the train has passed them! Universal Signalling's new 'U-Cross' system may be an alternative solution to VaMoS ('**Va**lue for **Mo**ney **S**ystem' - BLN 1428.1689 and back references). It may also be the first major positive benefit of the Onllwyn Global Centre of Rail Excellence, where it was first demonstrated in 2024.

The Central Wales line has numerous such crossings; 20 are on the **Llandeilo** to **Llandovery** section, where the system was trialled from 3 to 14 Nov - successfully, according to NR. Green disc sensors known as U-Beacon Universal Locator Beacons (U-BULBs?) were attached to sleepers during only 2½ nights and no prior lineside design work was needed. Trains were fitted with readers and communications equipment, which automatically transmitted their position to the signaller relative to each crossing, including their proximity by number of seconds on the approach. NR will now look to extend U-Cross to the full Central Wales line before considering it for other rural routes. So, will VaMoS vamoose?

Presumably, U-Cross and VaMoS are cheaper to install on the track than OMSL (Overlay Miniature Stop Lights), described in item 2482 about the **Southend Victoria** line. However, what are the implications of trains working over the Central Wales line having to be specially equipped? Presumably, some diesel locos will need to be fitted, to work engineer's trains but how easily can charter trains be operated? Will rolling stock modifications and operational constraints make the systems cost-effective options?

**2531] Cardiff Bay:** (BLN 1479.2047) Local observation and photographic evidence confirms that work during the 17-21 Nov shutdown concentrated on **Butetown** stop. The northbound, as yet trackless, platform is now structurally complete but bereft of 'furniture'. A permanent staircase up from Bute St is still lacking and there is as yet only the frame of a lift tower. The southbound (Down) platform, adjacent to the existing single line, also still lacks furniture, ticket machines, etc but the site compound hoarding is gradually being replaced with portable fencing as the access paths and landscaping of the area between the station and Lloyd George Ave on the east (Down) side are completed. There is solid, albeit temporary, fencing blocking the future tramway pedestrian crossing at the north end of the platforms, suggesting that the stop will open with just the Down platform in use, before redoubling is completed.

**2532] Port Talbot - Swansea:** ❶(TRACKmaps 3 p23A 2023) At 16.25 on Sat 22 Nov, the facing points at **Court Sart Jn** (206m 58ch) lost detection. This effectively blocked the Down Main line from the facing crossover at **Briton Ferry East Jn** (205m 22ch) to **Landore West Jn** (215m 07ch), just 15ch shy of 10 miles.

The bidirectional signalling was called into play and single line working operated on the Up Main until the offending points were clipped normal with detection at 17.48 - one way of making doubly sure that the **Landore Viaduct** weight restriction was not exceeded (BLN 1483.2411)! Down services taking advantage (and permitted to run at normal speeds) were GWR 13.48 **Paddington** to **Swansea**, TfW 15.43 **Cardiff** to **Swansea** and 16.06 **Cardiff** to **Milford Haven**. However, at this busy time of day other delays and turnbacks resulted; interestingly TfW favoured using replacement buses to minimise these but none was available, so it was forced to run delayed trains instead! Also, it is understood that the offending points could still not be safely reversed without a risk of them becoming stuck in that position.

Access to the Swansea District line therefore remained blocked and the DBC 10.22 **Tilbury** to **Trostre Works** was held on the Ogmore Vale Extension line at **Margam** while the points were rectified. Normal working resumed at 00.06 (Sun) and the DBC freight left **Margam** at 00.15, just 43 min late. 2½ hours earlier, the operator had been quite prepared to terminate it there; indeed, note that Realtime Trains shows a cancelled 08.55 **Margam** to **Trostre** working for 23 Nov and not the actual overnight working!

❷Then, at 16.00 on Wed 26 Nov, the axle counters failed at **Swansea Loop West Jn** locking all points 'normal'. Following rectification, normal working resumed at 20.36, after a 'sweep' train had reset the signal aspects. Meanwhile the Up and Down Swansea Loop lines were blocked, with all trains routed via **Landore**. Trains to/from the west were diverted via a reversal at **Landore East Jn** and the bidirectional single track **Swansea Avoiding Line** or vice versa. Up trains and those for the west ran via the Down Swansea Main line. The recently commissioned Port Talbot West Phase 2 was not involved with these.

**2533] Wylfa:** (BLN 1475.1560) On 13 Nov, the Prime Minister announced that this is confirmed as the location for the UK's first small modular nuclear reactor (SMR) power station. It is to have three SMRs initially but the site has the potential for up to eight, each of which could provide electricity for about 970,000 homes. It is to be built by Great British Energy-Nuclear (GBE-N; https://bit.ly/4r1I9JG ), owned by the UK Government which is investing £2.5bn in the project. The SMRs will be designed by Rolls-Royce, subject to final contracts expected to be signed by the end of this year. Regulatory approval, factories to construct the SMRs and training the workforce to run them are also required.

Work is due to start in 2026 with the aim of generating power by the mid-2030s; 2032 was mentioned previously and we shall see if there will be as much time slippage as with larger projects! GBE-N is also tasked with identifying potential sites for a further large nuclear plant by Autumn 2026. The previous UK government declared **Wylfa** as its preference in 2024 and it is unclear whether the SMR proposals now rule out a large plant. The US ambassador seems to have assumed so and is 'extremely disappointed' but the UK has said that they haven't closed the door on a US manufacturer working on a future project.

**1484 THIRTY YEARS OF MINOR RAILWAYS (Peter Scott)** minor-railways-news@branchline.uk
**Includes those covered by the 'Minor Railways' publication, (not IOM) in general anything not relating to the British or Irish National Networks or Local Authority Light Rail and Tramway Systems.**

**MR218] Severn Beach Miniature Railway**, Gloucestershire (BLN 1470.MR60): Regrettably, the project to build a new 10¼" gauge railway here is no more. Founder of the project Joe Nemeth posted this message on his Facebook page in early November: *Sad News. It is with a sad and broken heart that I must announce that the Severn Beach Miniature Railway project is no more. After a long battle with South Gloucestershire Council planning team and Planning Enforcement I have had to call it a day. I was given permission to start this project and I have emails etc to prove this. A lease was drawn up for the railway then later retracted so I couldn't sign it. Our community and volunteers have been deprived of an amazing project. I would like to personally thank you all for following this project and wish you all well*. All the equipment and track Joe had assembled for the new railway is now for sale.

**MR219] Exeter Miniature Railway**, Devon (MR p15) (BLN 1450.MR106): This 5/7¼" gauge 210yd railway is owned and operated by the Exeter & District Model Engineering Society. The long low bridge to complete the circuit had been installed by June. The track over the bridge has now been laid and should be available for the public on the first Sunday in February (or March) awaiting the completion of fencing.

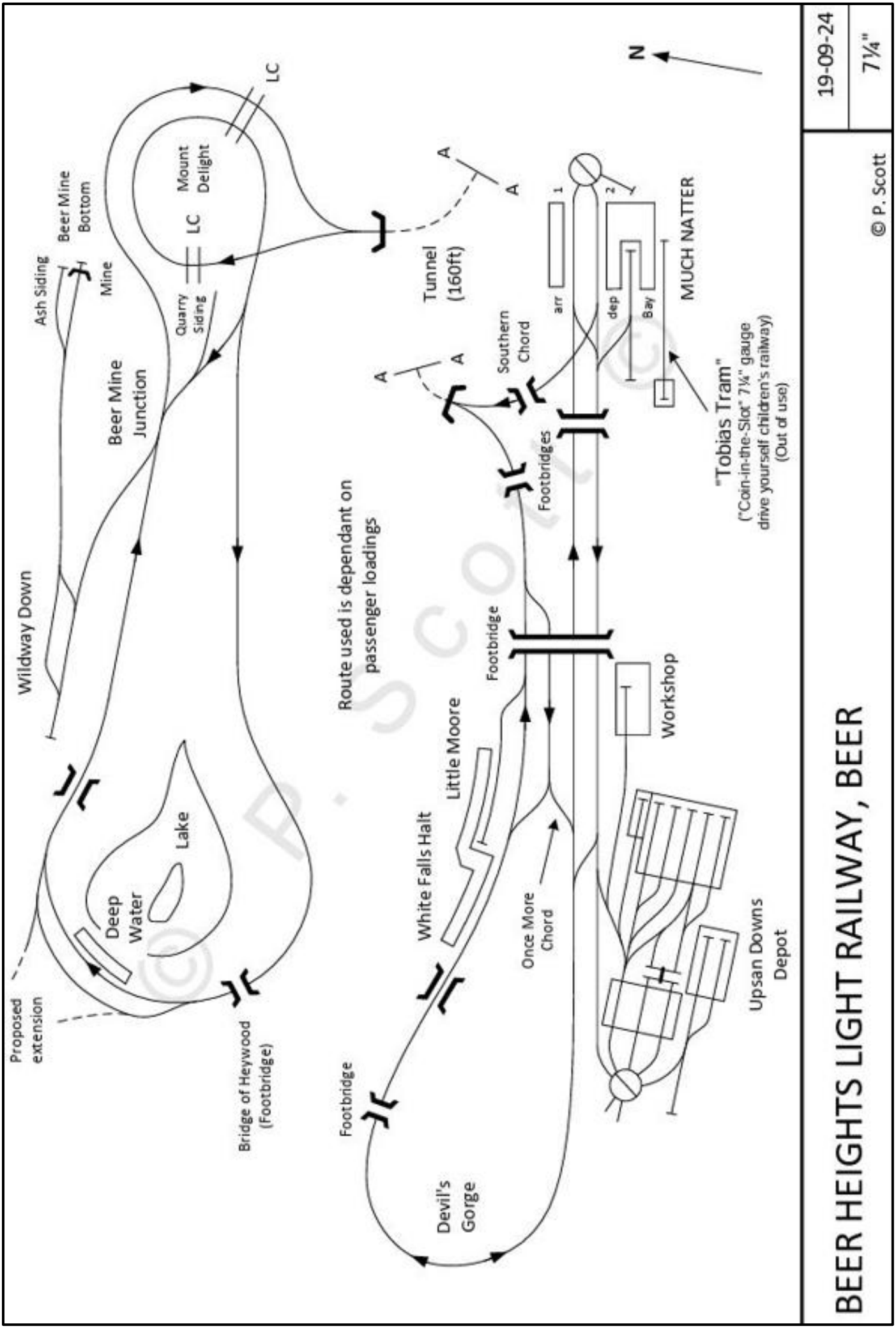
http://www.minorrailways.co.uk/trackplans/exetermin.pdf is the 5 May 2024 plan with the extension.

**MR220] Vitacress Salads Ltd**, Bere Regis, Dorset: The BBC 'Dorset News' website carried an article about this 18" gauge railway on 2 September. Located at Dodding's Farm, it is thought to be the last surviving agricultural railway in the country. Until 2023, the loco (4wPH Jesty 1948), called the 'Watercress Queen', had operated to-and-fro on a raised platform above the watercress beds. However, as the railway turns 100, it faces an uncertain future. Author and Miniature Railway magazine editor David Henshaw, who wrote a book about the railway, visited the farm in 2023 and said the line was still operational then.

Now the train's interior is full of cobwebs and it has been out of action for a while. *Sadly it's not in it's best state at the moment*, said Kelvin Dutton, the farm Manager. Mr Dutton has only been working on the farm for two years but said other staff remember it working through the generations. *As much as I'm aware, the track was* [used for] *trench trains - it would take ammunition into the trenches and bring people or supplies back out* he said. After WWI, when the army had less use for the railway track, it was cheap to buy. *Someone had a bright idea and thought, that would be pretty good for moving watercress around*, he said. The train has a cult following online with fans trying to have a glimpse of it at least a few times a year. But Mr Dutton said he thinks it has probably reached the end of its useful working life on the farm. *I would like to get it up and running and maintained a bit better. Maybe give it a nice paint.*

*I think there's a lot more people out there who know a lot more about it than we do - we've just inherited this piece of history, really*, said Mr Dutton. David Henshaw said that he's recently been in touch with a volunteer society that maintains a preserved 18" railway. *They said 'find out what's going on! We want everything!* So, it's not going to be scrapped, unless they manage to scrap it before anyone gets there.

**BELOW:** (MR 221) **Beer Heights Light Railway**; 19 Sep 2024 © Peter Scott, strictly for personal use only.



**MR221] Beer Heights Light Railway**, Devon (MR p15) (BLN 1459.MR201): Sadly, this complex, fully signalled and immaculately kept, 7¼" gauge, 1,300yd railway has closed. It was in its 50th year having opened on 14 July 1975. The Railway last ran on Saturday 1 November 2025. It was part of the Pecorama attraction, owned and operated by model railway manufacturer Peco at their site at Beer in East Devon.

The company issued this statement in November: *It is with great sadness and after much soul-searching we have decided to close Pecorama, our well-loved family attraction, for the 2026 season. Despite Pecorama having had a busy year of trading involving its 50th anniversary of the Beer Heights Railway and concluding this past half term week with rewarding Halloween events, the business continues to make a loss. What is generally not known is that Pecorama is only profitable for about 4 months of the year and the remaining months has to be supported financially. This has been the case for many years.*

*With the challenging economic climate and costs continuing to rise, the PECO parent company cannot continue to give this support each year to Pecorama. There is sincere hope that Pecorama can reopen in future in a new format which will continue to give lots of inspiration, fun and pleasure to our visitors. For the moment PECO will be focusing on growing the core businesses of manufacturing and publishing*.

[As the Railway is closed, the trackplan has been removed from Peter's website but he kindly agreed to it being reproduced for the record in BLN. It is ©Peter Scott and for personal use only please.]

**MR222] Sittingbourne & Kemsley Light Railway**, Kent (MR p19) (BLN 1371.MR29): On Wednesday 27 August, a member visited this 1¾ mile long, 2ft 6in narrow gauge part of the former Industrial Bowater Paper Mills Railway. It was his first visit this year. The Railway has improved **Sittingbourne Viaduct** station entrance. The previous entrance was only via steep stairs and made it difficult for some elderly people and pushchair access, although staff were normally on hand to help. Now there is direct access from behind their car park, all on one level. Additionally, they have now finished rebuilding the previous wooden platform, it has been replaced with a longer concrete one. There are also toilets and a more secure ticket office at the entrance end of the platform. Everything else is much the same as before, although at present there is only one steam loco in operation: 0-4-2ST 'Premier' (KS886/1905). As usual, it was an enjoyable visit and the staff are always friendly and helpful.

http://www.minorrailways.co.uk/trackplans/sklr.pdf is Peter Scott's 24 September 2017 trackplan.

**MR223] Leicestershire Industrial History Society** (**LIHS**), Leicestershire (Supp 3) (BLN 1481.MR188): The Society has stated that visitor numbers to **Glenfield Tunnel** more than doubled after the 7¼" gauge miniature railway was installed. LIHS, which operates the railway, has run tours for 13 years but said it had seen a boost in visitors since the railway opened. Roger Caunt, Chairman of the society, said it usually welcomed about 2,000 visitors but this year that more than doubled to 5,000. He added:

*The tours have always been very successful, but this year we decided to have the added attraction of the miniature railway and it's been unbelievably popular. It's been far beyond what we could have imagined. We think the tunnel is a hidden gem, so we're all very pleased to show it off*. In late October, the LIHS confirmed the railway would run again in the tunnel during 2026. The tunnel was 'vacated' at the end of October until May, so long-eared brown bats can hibernate for the winter. On a visit earlier this year two members were told that the track would stay in place and even be extended. The railway will run again during July and September 2026. Tickets to ride are free but visitors are asked to make a donation.

**MR224] Anchor Express**, Nottinghamshire: This is a new 7¼" gauge railway at the Anchor Pub & Café (SK 682 438) on Main Street, Gunthorpe, NG14 7EU, close to the River Trent. The line comprises a circuit of 200 yards with one station. It opened on Friday 2 May 2025, along with the refurbished pub and new café. A keen member visited on 30 October 2025, during the half-term holidays. The Pub had been derelict for some years until a local businessman set about a major transformation with the addition of the miniature railway in the grounds. Rolling stock comprises two sit-astride coaches and an 0-6-0T loco - although the train is powered from the coach via batteries and the loco is simply a model.

Normal running times are weekends only from 12.00 weather permitting - it also operates daily in the school holidays. The driver Frank made our reporter very welcome and gave him a couple of trips round - he even wore a gold braided hat. The train is free for pub and café patrons. Note it is very busy at weekends. The café is open until 13.00 and is well worth a visit. Website: https://anchorgunthorpe.com/

**MR225] North Dorset Railway**, Dorset (BLN 1478.MR161): This half mile standard gauge railway is based at **Shillingstone** station (46m 67ch from **Bath Junction**) on the former Somerset & Dorset Railway. Dorset County Council has agreed proposals to turn **Shillingstone** station into an operational railway and museum - one of the final stages before it starts regular steam and diesel passenger services. There have been a small number of objections to the use of both machines from nearby houses, with objectors claiming they will produce unacceptable noise and air pollution and add to traffic in the area using the recently completed 50-space car park, although planning officers say the 'nuisance' from the trains will only be transitory and infrequent. Due to a lack of landowner agreement, the Railway is unlikely to be expanded to the east, beyond Bere Marsh Farm, limiting to just 780m of track, with a likely maximum use of six trains a day. It is hoped passenger rides can start in Autumn 2026.

On 22 November, the 1959 Hudswell Clarke diesel with a loaded ballast wagon became the first train to cross the newly renovated Lamb House underbridge, north of the station, over Bere Marsh (road) in 59 years. The line CP 7 Mar 1966; the previous train was a Hymek hauling a track lifting train that year.

**MR226] Belton House Miniature Railway**, Lincolnshire (MR p20) (BLN 1240.MR141): This 7¼" gauge, 570 yard long railway is the only miniature railway at a National Trust property. The LincsOnline website posted an item dated 18 September. That stated the railway had *been taken off the tracks while funds are raised for its replacement*. It went on: *Belton Estate, near Grantham, has temporarily removed its miniature train - a staple for young families visiting the venue - after repeated derailments and rising repair costs*. Charlotte Beaver, visitor operations and experience manager at Belton, said: *We are all so fond of our little train, so it was heart breaking to have to take it out of action. As a charity, the cost of constantly repairing it was becoming too great and we need to start channelling any funding we can into procuring a new train, which will be much more fit for purpose*. The National Trust has launched a campaign to replace the train and track with an *electric engine*. The railway has been a family favourite for generations and is *expected back soon*. Plans also include an accessible compartment to allow more visitors to enjoy the ride through the estate's outdoor adventure playground. Hull Trains is already helping to promote the campaign. https://tinyurl.com/3c752na9 is the layout. [MR Ed: It is perhaps likely that regauging to a larger gauge may be considered, given the location and passenger numbers.]

**MR227] Vale of Berkeley Railway**, Gloucestershire: This railway is based at **Sharpness** in the dock area and the former Oldminster sidings. It carried its first (non-public) passengers on Wednesday 15 October 2025. The train consisted of a Hibberd diesel and one 20 ton brakevan. It is hoped that the railway should fully open to the public sometime in 2026. https://www.vobr.org.uk/ is the Railway website.

## 1484 FIXTURE REPORTS (Paul Stewart) bln.editor@branchline.uk

**2534] BLS Crewe Independent & Basford Hall Signal Box Visits**; **15 Oct 2024:** By John Cowburn (1793).

◎**Introduction:** Many members of our Society will have glimpsed an elderly signal box nestling in the cutting adjacent to the elusive 'Independent Lines' that avoid **Crewe** station and another somewhat more modern box lurking in what looks like the middle of **Basford Hall Yard** to the south. The yards are said to take their name from a timber framed manor house which was destroyed by fire about 1700AD. It appears that the ruins of the building survived until they were mostly swept away by the coming of the railway to the area in the second half of the 1830s. By the late 1800s, **Crewe** and its associated junctions seem to have been struggling to cope with the level of traffic on offer. The solution was for the London & North Western Railway (L&NWR) to construct a four-track freight railway passing west of the station, at a lower level so that tunnels could take the freight trains underneath **Crewe North Jn**, with what would now be known as grade separated access at the north end to both the West Coast Main Line (WCML) and the **Manchester** line. **Basford Hall Yard** came about as part of the same development.

Some overnight Motorail trains ran via the Crewe Independent Lines. Your Editor recalls doing the **Up Liverpool Independent** on the 1 May 1977 **Stirling** to **Brockenhurst** Motorail (without a car but with a 2-week All Line Rover). They were in ***PSUL*** until 1981 but the last scheduled passenger use (other than diversions and tours) was by the summer-only 21.30 **Euston** to **Holyhead**, which last ran on 24 Sep 1982.

There has been piecemeal resignalling over the years, including within **Basford Hall Yard**, where the London Midland Region of BR commissioned some new boxes of their own design in the mid-1960s.

It was only in 1985 that the **Crewe** station area and the immediately adjacent junctions were extensively remodelled and resignalled with the commissioning of **Crewe Power Signal Box** (PSB) at 158m 21ch, now known as **Crewe Signalling Control Centre** (**SCC**). **Gresty Lane SCC** has shared the same building since 2015. **Crewe SCC** still fringed with traditional boxes at most of the edges of its limited control area.

The Independent Lines survived this resignalling broadly unscathed and were used for diversions during the works. 40 years later, the restricted capacity of the main lines through the station has ensured that the Independent Lines remain the normal route for freight traffic. While now colour-light lit throughout, the Independent Lines were still, at the time of our visit (15 Oct 2024), largely worked on the Absolute Block system with sections of Permissive Working.

Ten members assembled on Nantwich Road in front of **Crewe** station at 09.15 and walked to **Crewe SCC**. This is the building which looks like a semaphore stop signal arm when viewed using satellite imagery. Here we met up with our host for the day, Natalie Thomas, Local Operations Manager for the **Crewe** boxes. Today's agenda did not include the SCC; instead, we were focusing on the three signal boxes which were due to be closed and demolished later in the year, with their signalling recontrolled. We donned Hi-Viz jackets and made our way to the first one, **Salop Goods Junction** box (157m 71ch).

◎**Salop Goods Junction:** The box sat in the bottom of the cutting on the Independent Lines, roughly level with the south end of the station to its east. This was a L&NWR box dating back to the opening of the lines in 1901. It retained a 65 lever frame, although 25 of these were white painted and no longer in use. Lever 51 had been removed and there were another five interlocking levers, which no longer worked signalling equipment but had to be retained and operated to maintain the integrity of the interlocking. An oddball was Lever 11, the Down Salop Line Distant, painted white on top and yellow at the bottom; it became redundant and non-working when **Gresty Lane** was resignalled. It is not known why the lever wasn't painted completely white but it was out of use and the catch-handle had been removed. All signals were colour lights and three of the six points were power worked; the two mechanically operated facing points had facing point locks. All running lines were track-circuited.

The box controlled routing of all traffic through the Independent Lines (TRACKmaps 4 p7A 2022). To the south, routes were available towards **Gresty Lane Jn** on the **Shrewsbury** line and **Basford Hall Yard**. To the north, the **Liverpool Independents** join the WCML to the north and the **Manchester Independents** join the line to that city, both burrowing under **Crewe North Jn**. There is no longer a **Chester Down Independent** but a unidirectional **Up Chester Independent** leads down into the cutting from the north end of **Crewe** station, only accessible from the **Chester** line at 158m 24ch. All lines are electrified at 25kV.

**Salop Goods Junction** box worked to five other signal boxes. The **Liverpool Independents** were worked Absolute Block (AB), using a very elderly L&NWR block instrument, with **Crewe Coal Yard** box on the Up side of the WCML north of the station. The **Manchester Independents** interfaced with **Manchester South Signalling SCC** located in **Stockport** using Track Circuit Block (TCB). The **Up Chester Independent** was also worked by TCB, with **Crewe SCC** sending trains. Towards **Shrewsbury**, the box worked TCB to **Gresty Lane SCC**, a 2015 NX panel which replaced the ex-L&NWR **Gresty Lane** box and operates as a separate signal box within the **Crewe SCC** building. All of these routes were covered by a single train describer which identified and indicated the position of trains on these lines.

The most interesting section was the last, towards **Crewe Sorting Sidings North** box for trains to/from **Basford Hall**. This was, and still is, a four-track railway with Fast lines and Slow lines in each direction, despite the highest permissible speed being 10 mph!! All four lines were worked under Absolute Block regulations but with permissive working (passenger lines) authorised in the Signal Box Special Instructions (SBSIs). Although not explicitly stated in either the Rule Book or the SBSIs, it might be expected that permissive working would only apply to non-passenger services. Logic would suggest that the permissive sections would have to be operated under Absolute Block rules to allow passenger trains to pass. [That happens with railtours - Ed.] There were special instructions around clearing protecting signals for passenger trains heading into the otherwise permissively worked section to maintain train separation. The lines are physically paired by direction; the outer are Fast lines and the inners the Slows.

Remarkably, these four lines were then still controlled by two L&NWR double line Permissive Block instruments, which may well have dated back to the box opening in 1901 and are believed to have been the last of their type in use on the network. Truly the Victorian railway at work! The instruments were paired by 'speed'; one controlled the **Up and Down Fast independents**, the other the **Up and Down Slow Independents**. Each included a dial so the accepting signaller could maintain a count of the number of trains in section, incrementing and reducing the count as trains entered and passed out of each section.

It was noted that the Permissive Block instruments each had a small plunger on their right hand side. Two different theories as to the working of these plungers were subsequently advanced - it is not confirmed which, if either, of these theories was correct (answers on a postcard, please):

- That they were used to cancel off each train that had been admitted into the section under permissive working arrangements. Under this logic, pressing the plunger would physically turn the commutator, reducing the train count in the section by one.
- That the plunger simply locked the commutator, so making the signaller think about how many trains were in the section, as he would need to press the plunger before turning the commutator.

Either way, the plungers were no longer in use but were still all connected up inside the instruments. Each instrument also had a brass '**PERMISSIVE**' plate to the right of the commutator which, when flipped over, showed '**ABSOLUTE**'; these were purely reminders for the signaller and had no electrical or mechanical connection to anything else.

The system of permissive working was documented in the SBSIs and had its own set of local bell codes. As an example, a Class 4 train being offered from **Crewe Sorting Sidings North** and accepted permissively by **Salop Goods Junction** would have been described with the normal 'is line clear' bell code for the class of train. However, it would be accepted using the special bell code 2-4-2, to indicate that the train was being accepted under permissive regulations. This would produce the following exchange of bells:

- **Sorting Sidings North:** 1 (call attention)
- **Salop Goods Junction:** 1 (acknowledge call attention)
- **Sorting Sidings North:** 3-1-1 (is line clear for Class 4 freight?)
- **Salop Goods Junction:** 2-4-2 (train accepted permissively)
- **Sorting Sidings North:** 2-4-2 (acknowledge permissive acceptance)

**Sorting Sidings North** would now be able to clear the 'calling on' position light signal under the main aspect to allow the train to enter the section permissively. Under normal acceptance, the **Salop Goods Junction** signaller would move their block indicator from 'Down Line Closed' to 'Down Line Clear'. With permissive acceptance, the indicator would already be at 'Down Train on Line', as there was already a train in section. Instead, **Salop Goods Junction** would increment the train count by one on their permissive instrument, by turning the commutator one position beyond 'Train on Line' on the front.

The train count was increased at this point, rather than when 'train entering section' (2 bells) was sent by the **Sorting Sidings North** signaller as the train passed them. Note that there was no mimicking of the train count in **Crewe Sorting Sidings North** box; all the sending signaller saw was 'Train on Line'. When the sending signaller sent 2 bells for train entering section, the signaller in advance simply repeated it back and there was no change to the state of the block instrument.

When a train (other than the last one) passed clear of the section, **Salop Goods Junction** sent 'train out of section' (2-1) to **Sorting Sidings North** and reduced the train count on the permissive block instrument by one. The train count was thus a reflection of the total number of trains 'accepted into but not yet cleared from' the section. When the final train left the section, **Salop Goods Junction** sent a single beat on the bell and 'dropped the block', that is moved it back to show 'Line Closed'. Each permissive instrument was designed to accommodate up to nine trains on each line but, as the section is only around half a mile long, all but one would likely have had to be light engines! The signaller on shift recalled dealing with up to four at a time on the instrument. Note also that special 'is line clear' bell codes were listed in the SBSIs as to be used on all lines as follows but they must have been very rarely used. Essentially, they are normal bell code for the types of train with an additional two bells at the end:

- Electric multiple unit express passenger train: 4-2
- Electric multiple unit ordinary passenger train: 3-1-2
- Electric multiple unit empty coaching stock train: 2-2-1-2
- Light electric locomotive: 2-3-2

**Salop Goods Junction** box (and **Sorting Sidings North**) each had 'fog marking points'. When these became obscured by poor weather / visibility, the method of working changed from Permissive Block to Absolute Block and only one train could be admitted into the block section. This removed the risk that the driver of a subsequent train permitted into the section had insufficient time to bring their train to a halt before reaching the rear of the previous train allowed into the section. There were no electrical or mechanical controls on the permissive instruments; it was purely left to the signaller to ensure that only one train was permitted at any one time, using the **PERMISSIVE / ABSOLUTE** reminders.

The train describer, which otherwise kept track of the trains in the **Salop Goods Junction** area, could not deal with multiple trains within the Permissive Block section, so the signaller had to manually interpose each Down train headcode as the train arrived. It was therefore most important that the signaller could correctly identify each train to avoid any potential misrouting. It appeared that the telephone was used between the signallers to confirm the identities of trains.

On each route through the junction, apart from the **Up Manchester Independent**, there were only two main aspect signals - a Home and a Starter - for each permutation. The **Up Manchester Independent** had an additional Outer Home and Inner Home to allow trains to be stacked.

Unusually for a lever frame box controlling colour light signals and power-worked points, Yellow Lever 40 controlled a 'working distant' for the **Up Liverpool Independent**. This needed to be reversed for the three-aspect **Coal Yard** starting signal that it applied to, to show a green. It appeared that it could be cleared once Signal 33 (using Lever 33) showed a proceed aspect for a train heading 'straight on' and then around the corner to **Gresty Lane**. It could also be cleared when Lever 37 for the diverging route was reversed and the signal cleared (the same physical signal as controlled by Lever 33 but with a 'feather') - but only if the train was heading towards the **Up Slow Independent** AND the main aspect section signal (36) had been cleared (that is the train had not been accepted permissively).

Our visit coincided with something of a lull in traffic but one train did pass through the section which allowed us to listen to the operation of the bells. It could however be very busy and this, combined with the complex routing possibilities and permissive working, meant that the box was a Grade 4 rôle.

The box was accessed from a secure compound by descending a short flight of steps part way down the cutting-side, then walking along the side of the cutting with direct access to the operating floor. Internally the box was unusual, with a false ceiling each end but the central section retained its full height to the pitched roof. This seemed to be due to the box diagram height, which would not otherwise have fitted!

Note that the most recent issue of the Sectional Appendix at the time of the visit (Oct 2024) showed the speed restriction over most of the Independent Lines as 10mph (15mph at the southern end of **Basford Hall Yard**) and they were shown as solid lines, so authorised for passenger use. [To be continued.]

**2535] The BLS Brecon Mountaineer**; **Mon 27 Oct 2025:** By Andrew Murray (2531). A car full of us arrived at **Pant** station just after 9.30 and couldn't help but notice the Caboose stabled at the southernmost extremity of the siding that runs down the west side of the shed and workshop almost into the car park. Despite it being nearly an hour until the train was due to depart, several members had already bagged a seat in the caboose for maximum track coverage. We left them out there and headed into the station buildings, and more specifically the café, to register our arrival and avail ourselves of the complimentary breakfast roll and hot drink kindly provided by the catering staff. Remarkably, after four days of heavy rain in the area, it was sunny and dry all day with lovely autumn colours which made all the difference.

This was the first ever trip of this type on this railway. There were 57 members registered on the day's charter, with a warning that it could be a bit snug on the tour. I went out at about 10 o'clock to photograph our train in its starting position and bag my seat. (Five keen participants had travelled nearly 400 miles from our Ayton Castle Railway visit in Scotland the afternoon before - BLN 1483.2414!)

It was good to see five wives/girlfriends in attendance at this very scenic railway. The train was made up of two carriages; the caboose was Coach 'E', coupled to Coach 'D' and diesel locomotive Ty7 1698.

Ty7 1968 is a 400 hp, diesel hydraulic locomotive built by Kambarka Engineering in Russia in 1981 as a 750mm gauge locomotive. The locomotive was used on a peat railway in Latvia before being imported by the Brecon Mountain Railway in 2010 and regauged to 600mm. I chose to travel on Coach 'D'. There seems to be two types of 'track basher', those that record track coverage based on where their bodies are and those that record track based on what the train covers. There was no need to guess which category those members that were already on the train were in, as most of the seats in the Caboose and at the southern end of Coach 'D' were taken. Being in the latter category, I made my way to the north end of Coach 'D', which remained empty! The remainder of Coach 'D' did fill up by our departure time and our Fixtures Secretary, together with today's fixture organiser, Gary Lonsdale took up their positions on the locomotive to direct the day's activities and liaise with the Brecon Mountain Railway (BMR) staff.

http://www.minorrailways.co.uk/trackplans/breconmountain.pdf is the 11 May 2025 trackplan.

With everybody on board, our tour departed on time at 10.30. The train having already been at the southern end of the siding we boarded on, departed north bound to the far end of the headshunt; a sign from our Fixtures Secretary confirmed that we had reached end of line. We reversed and were propelled to the shed doors on Line 3. Reversing again, we travelled north to clear the points and then propelled to the shed doors of Line 2; we then repeated this exercise to cover Line 1 to the doors. Shunting up and down the shed roads, it was noted that BMR's other operational diesel locomotive was stabled with various wagons on the Coal Road. This 0-6-0 diesel hydraulic locomotive was built by Brecon Mountain Railway in 1987 from parts supplied by Baguley Drewry and given Works Number 001.

With the Coal Road occupied, we left the shed area and made our way up to the station area. First, we traversed the runround loop to the buffer stops, then reversed back through the loop to clear the points before running along the platform line to the headshunt points. As these points are sprung, our tour was unable to cover the full platform line over them for overlap at this stage (but see later…)

After covering **Pant**, we headed north to **Torpantau**. Of note was the deviation slightly to the east past the landslip caused by a storm that briefly closed the line last November. Thien it was via **Pontsticill** platform line and right hand running at **Dolygaer** (the loop is the other non-preferred line). At **Torpantau** our tour ran through the platform (left) line to the buffer stops at the end of the headshunt. Here we could alight to stretch our legs and take photos. Of note, old photos and 25" maps reveal that the BMR platforms are at a lower level (and on level track), slightly east of the original standard gauge line here which was on an embankment approaching the 'other' **Torpantau** station, of which nothing remains.

Once everyone was back on, we were propelled south down the platform line to clear the north end points, allowing the loco to runround. With it now on the southern end of the train, we headed south to clear the south end points, reversed here and propelled back north through the runround loop and back into the headshunt. No one was left in any doubt that we reached as far as possible on this line!

[The BMR has asked if anyone did a GPS measurement of their line buffer stop to buffer stop, please!]

After the headshunt, we headed back south onto the runround loop to clear the points and then were propelled onto the siding to touch the buffer stops again. Every inch of track covered at **Torpantau**, we were hauled south through the runround loop towards **Dolygaer**. This was the BMR northern extremity from 2 Apr 1995 until 1 Apr 2014; we traversed the rare right hand loop (once for locos running round), requiring operation of the ground frame each end, before continuing to **Pontsticill**. Our tour arrived on the loop line, where participants could detain for a leg stretch and take advantage of the facilities.

**Pontsticill** to **Pant** was the initial section of the BMR, opened on 8 Jun 1980. Other than at **Torpantau** station and the last 500yd at **Pant** this 4½ mile, 1' 11¾" gauge line is on the trackbed of the Brecon & Merthyr Railway, CP 31 Dec 1962, CG/CA 4 May 1964. At **Pant**, it deviates southwest of the old line.

Once everyone had been ushered back on again, we were propelled north to clear the points with the platform line, before returning south into the platform. Here, the loco ran round to the north end of the train. Once coupled, the loco propelled us south to the sheds and we traversed Line 5 to the doors.

Here, again, we were allowed off the train, this time to explore the two sheds which had been opened up for us. Stored at the rear of the three-road shed was BMR's second Kambarka locomotive, number TU46 001; also in here was their Plasser & Theurer 4-wheel tamper, among other rolling stock.

The sheds explored, we were all on board for further coverage of the track at **Pontsticill**. First shed lines 4 and 3 to the doors respectively, before heading back northwards through the station on the loop line to clear the north end points. We were then propelled back south around the back of the station and down to the two road shed, where we covered Line 2 to the doors. After returning to the north end points, we propelled onto the platform line again, where the Kambarka ran round our train. Some of the lines here run through grass and they had all been devegetated recently for our tour. **Pontsticill** now done, we were hauled back south and into the platform at **Pant** where we disembarked again.

With everyone off, the two coaches were propelled out of the station and deposited on the running line by the shed headshunt. The loco then returned to the platform light engine. Members were invited to board it to traverse the platform line through the sprung points (which could not be done in the coaches) to the end of line. The runround loop was then taken to clear of the points at the north end, to reverse and return to the platform. Some had left, perhaps now wishing they hadn't, so it only took four trips for everyone left to do it. On the fourth trip. the loco coupled up to the coaches before returning to the platform. With the coaches at the platform, the loco ran round again, putting it back on the north end.

The 0-6-0 diesel loco was fired up, moving itself and all but one of the wagons stabled on the Coal Road out to an adjacent siding. All those participants still at **Pant** saw this and knew what it meant.

Indeed, we were called back onto the train which ran back down to the shed area and propelled onto the Coal Road. We didn't quite reach the buffer stops here, as a wagon with a skip on it prevented this.

At this point our Fixtures Secretary and Gary Lonsdale quickly climbed down from the cab of the Kambarka and scurried over to the 0-6-0 diesel. The Kambarka was uncoupled and moved off into the headshunt and then disappeared into the shed, being quickly replaced by the 0-6-0. With the 0-6-0 at the front, we pulled forward to clear the crossover with Line 1, reversed and were propelled over the crossover and onto Line 1 to the shed door. Once this move had been completed, we were hauled back to the headshunt to clear the points and propelled into the platform. It was our last move of the day.

Before the long drive home, I visited the workshops which held the two operational steam locos. These were both built by Baldwin in Philadelphia. N°1 was built as works number 15511 in 1897 and was originally a 2-6-0 locomotive, rebuilt as a 2-6-2 by the BMR, returning to service in 2019. N°2 was built by Baldwin in 1930 as works number 61269 and is a 4-6-2. Also in the workshops was the railway's new build replica 2-4-4 tank locomotive, which will become their N°3.

Our thanks to the BMR for an excellent, comprehensive tour, to Gary Lonsdale for the arrangements and stock list also Peter Scott for the track plan and Martyn Brailsford who customised and marked it up.

**2536] Manchester Roundabout Railway** (**partly** '**underground**') **Architecture Tour; Fri 14 Nov 2025:** John Hampson (2635). Adam Turner's **Manchester** tours are always hugely popular, unsurprisingly this fixture sold out in only two hours. The plan was to visit historic or hidden features at or around the four historic principal **Manchester** stations: **Piccadilly**, **Victoria**, **Central** and **Exchange**. All except one had featured, to a greater or lesser extent, on previous tours but a visit to all in a day was not to be missed.

Despite the extreme wet and windy weather, 14 members assembled by the taxi rank on Fairfield Street, kitted out with the mandatory Hi-Viz vests, hard hats, boots and torches. The equipment specification suggested a promising itinerary. First, the bad news. As a result of the ongoing battering from Storm Claudia that day, the National Trust had understandably decided that it would be unsuitable for us to visit the currently undeveloped part of **Castlefield Viaduct** at the throat of the former **Central Station**. We could see rail and Metrolink service suspensions being progressively posted as the day progressed, due to deteriorating weather, and the suggestion of spending more time under cover at the other locations instead was decidedly more attractive. We can return to **Castlefield** another time.

Our NR hosts, Toby and Mike, welcomed us to NR reception at **Piccadilly** for our safety briefing. Despite many visits, I had never previously noticed this entrance tucked away on the lower mezzanine floor and

dominated by an enormous original girder. **Piccadilly** was substantially refurbished in the late 1990s, with new expanded facilities opening in 2002 for the Commonwealth Games. Much of the previous 1960s development was replaced with a new expanded concourse fitted around the base of the existing tower block. **Manchester Piccadilly Signalling Control Centre** remains on the first floor of the tower.

Our route up to the concourse roof was via an external service door on the London Road side of the building. Steel steps led to two plant rooms, where there was a considerable amount of ventilation and refrigeration equipment necessary to support the retail units on the floors below. Rental income from retail units provides a valuable source of income for NR. From a walkway outside the plant rooms, we were able to look out at a rather unusual view across the wet concourse and trainshed roof. Back inside, a convenient route was via a closed retail unit, which had previously been a TGI Fridays. Seemingly out of use for some years but still fitted out and with menus still on the tables, covered in dust.

**Piccadilly** undercroft was our next target. Accessed through large iron gates on Fairfield Street, this is a vast area extending from Travis Street in the south to the Metrolink stop in the north and is largely under the station throat rather than the platformed area. It is currently undeveloped although it may have considerable potential due to the adjacent **Mayfield** station regeneration area. There is no lighting, and the floors are damp and uneven. In the past though, the arches would have been a busy transshipment area. Adam was able to show us fascinating archive diagrams which identified the previous function of some of the arches. One area was specifically for handling bananas, another for beer and another for cotton. The old plans showed many rail lines and turntables and there was a little evidence of these.

We passed to the north side of the undercroft via a door off the Metrolink platform into a car park area, revealing brick pointed gothic arches and, adjacent to Boad Street, maroon iron columns. The final point of call at **Piccadilly** was the old stairway between Store Street and the station approach. Toby just happened to have the key and thought we might be interested… Although out of service for many years and blocked up at the top, the original stairway and its balustrade still exists. We were able to climb right to the top in true BLS fashion. Several members of the group remembered using this route decades ago.

Since we were no longer going to **Castlefield Viaduct**, the most direct route to **Victoria** was on a **Bury** tram. The destination displays at the stop showed **Bury** but the display on the tram showed **Whitefield**. A fallen tree on the line meant that trams were turning back at **Whitefield** via the rare crossover. Not one that I need though. I had a Manchester Central Zone (MCZ) rail ticket which includes Metrolink travel in Central Manchester but members from further afield tested the Metrolink contactless tap in and tap out functionality, which now accounts for the great majority of Metrolink ticket sales. We also later noticed that trams were turning back on the single track at **Newton Heath** due to problems beyond.

**Victoria Offices** building was constructed by the Lancashire & Yorkshire Railway in 1909, during the final enlargement of the station. Although a Grade II listed building, it has been vacant for several years and is deteriorating as it is unheated. NR had planned to refurbish the building to allow staff to be transferred from the Square One complex east of **Piccadilly**, as this was within the footprint of the HS2 development. Accordingly, preliminary work started last year on a 'soft demolition' of modern partitions and fittings to reveal the historic features which would need to be conserved. Unfortunately, earlier this year plans changed; NR now propose to stay at Square One. Work on developing **Victoria Offices** has ceased, pending the identification of a new use for the building which remains in its stripped out state.

We entered the building via a service door into the southern stairwell where a new lift has been installed. The first floor only extends across the southern part of the building to allow for the additional height of the foyer by the booking office. As modern partitions have been removed, many of the residual rooms are large with substantial transverse girders, earning the building its nickname as 'The battleship'. Adam had brought fascinating archive documents showing the historical function of some of the rooms.

Being cautious to avoid patches of slippery moss in the wet weather, we were able to walk to the northern end of the roof and inspect the mechanism of the now electric clock that is visible from Hunts Bank. There was an excellent panorama across the city centre and the lines converging at **Deal St Jn**. There had been a rifle range at the northern end of the roof in times past but no trace remained.

One of the largest rooms on the third floor was home to the Lancashire & Yorkshire Railway Signalling School. This featured a model railway connected to actual signalling equipment built by apprentices at Horwich Works in 1912 for signalling staff training and adapted over 80 years to include developments in signalling procedure and technology. In 1995, the entire model railway was donated to the National Railway Museum, where it has been restored and remains operational. Indeed, it is claimed to be the world's oldest complete working model railway. Some of the group remembered visiting the Signalling School when the model railway was operational. A video: https://tinyurl.com/2vrxjy54 (1min 43sec).

At the northern end of the third floor were a number of smaller rooms which had originally been a residential area. The strip out had revealed period wallpaper when suspended ceilings were removed and this was hopefully to be conserved in accordance with the listed status. Similarly, impressive original glazed tiles in the stairwells had been revealed along with heritage ceramic fittings in the washrooms.

Next, the second floor, which extends the length of the building. We could look down from the corridor onto the concourse and Metrolink platforms below. Many of the rooms were fitted with a ducted ventilation system, which was state of the art when installed in the early 1900s.

After another safety briefing, we descended to the basement of the building. This area was not proposed to be refurbished as part of the NR scheme, so has not been stripped out. There is no fixed lighting but there was temporary lighting. The British Railways Staff Association Club, known colloquially as Vic Bars, occupied the upper basement floor at the southern end of the building. The club closed in 1992 and has been derelict since. A former entrance on the opposite side of **Victoria Station Approach** is now occupied by a hairdresser. The garish 1970s décor and features remain, including a DJ booth, bar area with parquet flooring throughout and a nicotine-stained ceiling (how tasteful).

Descending again, we reached the lower basement level, much of which consists of a series of arches under **Victoria Station Approach** which is itself a viaduct. The 1909 enlargement of the station involved culverting and building across the River Irk and these arches straddled the original sandstone river bank. We found the remains of a 'dumb waiter' and a staircase heading up which was blocked at the top.

Moving northwards, a steel door led us onto the bridge over the River Irk. Although completely enclosed, we were able to look down onto (and hear the roar of) the very fast-flowing river below. The hatch is normally sealed but had been opened for access to scaffolding for an inspection of the bridge and had not been resealed yet - perfect timing! Over the doorways at either end of the bridge was historic but incomplete lettering, indicating past commercial use of the arches beneath Victoria Station Approach. One arch is thought to have 'bottling stores' and another arch 'John Brown & Co' (understood to be an historic Manchester based bottle manufacturer) - the bridge is now only used as a service tunnel.

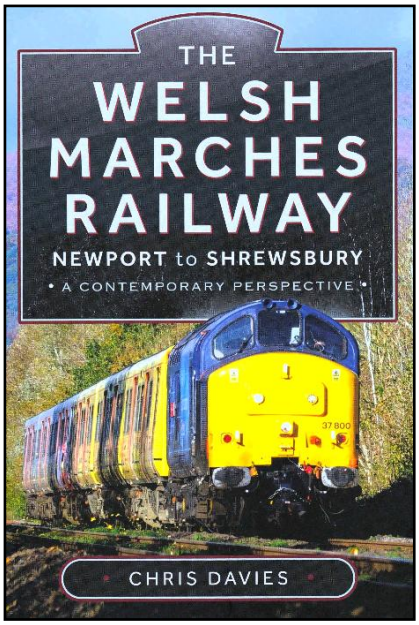
Beyond the bridge, we emerged into daylight in Walkers Croft. Originally a street alongside the River Irk before the station was extended, the covered area is gated (how irksome) and extends under the concourse. Could there have ever been access to the concourse from here? If so, no evidence remains.

Our final visit was to **Exchange** undercroft. The station CP 5 May 1969 (along with **Manchester Central**) but remained open for newspaper traffic. The last newspaper trains ran on the night of 9-10 Jul 1988 and were the final dedicated such trains. No surface features remain; the track was lifted in 1993 with **Victoria** remodelling and the footbridge was finally removed in 2014. The curved former cab road is now a service road to the new development on the site. Original retaining walls and a bridge to one of the former platform lines still stand. The site of **Exchange** is in the City of Salford rather than **Manchester**; the boundary is the River Irwell and a crest featuring elements of the City of Salford coat of arms has been restored over an archway in Greengate. Perhaps it should have been 'Salford Exchange' after all?

The station originally had two approaches: Firstly, by way of a bridge across the River Irwell directly from **Manchester**, known as the Cathedral Approach, and secondly from **Salford** via the Salford Approach. A privately owned car park operates in Harding Street undercroft arches at the western end of the former **Exchange** site, accessed from the former Salford Approach. We were able to explore the extent of this area, which consisted of several high arches that would have been under part of the original station and are perhaps the only part of the site which have not significantly changed in recent years.

This was another excellent and informative tour. Enormous thanks are due to Adam for organising and leading the tour and to Toby and Mike from Network Rail for allowing us access to the facilities and for sharing their extensive knowledge with us. Proceeds from the tour amounting to £470 have been donated to Mustard Tree and Embassy, both charities working with the homeless in Manchester.

**Details must be checked** **1484 CONNECTIONS (Paul Stewart)** bln.editor@branchline.uk **Please mention BLN**




**2537] The Welsh Marches Railway, Newport to Shrewsbury:** By: Chris Davies, hardback, 216 pages 25.6cm x 17.2cm, 260 colour images. Published Pen & Sword, RRP: £29.99 (offer price £22.49, less on eBay), e-Book £18.99. Author Chris Davies grew up in South Wales and, from a young age, was interested in railways especially those locally. In this book, he concentrates on the **Newport** to **Shrewsbury** section running along the borders between England and Wales. Its trains, passenger services, stations, wonderful signal boxes, junctions and freight flows are covered in detail. The line, built by two independent companies, was opened in 1853; by 1870, these small independent companies had merged into the GWR and L&NWR. In 1874, it was extended to **Newport** by the Pontypool, Caerleon & Newport Railway, which then merged with the GWR in 1876. Prior to 1948 nationalisation, **Newport** to **Hereford** was operated by GWR and **Hereford** to **Shrewsbury** jointly by the GWR and LMS. In 1958 under British Railways, the line was hit with closures firstly of numerous intermediate stations that had served rural communities, then in 1960 more closures including several branch lines. From the 1990s, freight services declined further but passenger services increased as the line became an important route between South Wales and North West England. Services were expanded again beyond just **Cardiff** to **Crewe**, extending to **Manchester**, **Holyhead**, **Carmarthen**, **Milford Haven** and **Fishguard Harbour**. The 'Absolute Block' method of signalling from 17, mostly large, signal boxes, is the greatest number used consecutively like this across the UK, although two are sometimes switched out. They include probably the smallest box on the network now, **Onibury**. There is also the largest working mechanical signal box in the world now at **Shrewsbury Severn Bridge Junction**; the grandness and historic importance of the boxes is highlighted in this book. There were once 35 stations between **Shrewsbury** and **Newport** via **Hereford** compared with eight now, this includes **Craven Arms** station, which is a popular one with enthusiasts.

This book has some wonderful colour photos of the picturesque rural routes, the continuing freight and busy passenger services including the various diesel locomotives that operate along the route. A chapter details various steam charters that have run on the line together with a few photos of some of the final steam locomotives in normal passenger service before withdrawal. The highlight though is the unique stations and signal boxes that still stand majestically along this railway line and make this new book a great Christmas present for any railway enthusiast relative or friend. (Dana Wiffen)

**2538] Cab Rides:** https://tinyurl.com/yc6f554r details a Martin House Hospice super charity raffle with **SEVEN** railway related prizes and details of how to enter. **INCLUDED ARE THREE FREIGHT TRAIN CAB RIDES.** Multiple entries welcome - closes 19 Dec. The 9-page PDF is also reproduced within E-BLN 1483.

**2539] Merry Christmas!** https://www.charitycardshop.com/RBF links to RBF's online Christmas shop.

**2540] FREE SCOTRAIL TICKETS!** https://tinyurl.com/3wh8kk6j is a competition to win return tickets betwixt any two Scottish stations on ScotRail for a group of up to four people (three prizes) Closes 5 Jan.


✱**BLS & BLN Contact Details:** See BLN 1460 (23 Nov 2024) centrefold, e-BLN or PDF on our website 'Archive'✱
●**Editor: Paul Stewart** bln.editor@branchline.uk 4 Clarence Close, MALVERN, WR14 3HX ✆01684 562862 ✆07790 652351.
●**Sales: Darren Garnon** sales.officer@branchline.uk 3 Reader Drive, Marden, TONBRIDGE, Kent, TN12 9FD.
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