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On Shed



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Summer 2022

Welcome

to **On Shed**, the official journal of the
8E Railway Association.

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[Front Cover: War Department Austerity tank locomotive 75178 awaits departure from Bodmin General Station on Tuesday 21st June 2022. This was the only standard gauge train service operating in Cornwall on the date of the rail strike. (Photo: Mike Lenz)

This page: Rebuilt Merchant Navy Pacific locomotive 35018 'British India Line' seen on the pit at Crewe Heritage Centre during a layover as a result of the hot weather resulting in the cancellation of its booked tour. Monday 18th July 2022. (Photo: Mike Lenz)

From the Editor. Mike Lenz

It is time once again for another issue of 'On Shed' and I would like to thank all the contributors who have responded to my request for material. If your travels have taken you to a preserved railway or involved travel by rail then why not send us an article about your travels and include photos if you have taken any. That way we can keep the journal interesting for our readers.

All contributions for the winter issue to reach me by December 21st 2022.

Chairman's Report. Mike Lenz

After a period of almost two years it was good to be able to start our program of monthly meetings with our AGM in March followed by one of Jon Penn's excellent presentations. Our April meeting should have seen David Maidment give a presentation, but unfortunately he tested positive for Covid a couple of days before the date so yours truly had to step in with a last minute video presentation covering the rail activity around Crewe North junction over the past decade. Fortunately David was able to come along to our May meeting and gave an excellent slide show and talk about his railway interest and employment in the 1950s to 1960s. He will be returning for a further presentation following on from where the previous one ended in our 2022-23 season.

At the time of writing we have not had any summer outings but hopefully we will have managed something during August/early September.

Jon Penn has been working hard on a new season of fixtures for 2022-23 and hopefully we will return to a more normal routine after a turbulent couple of years.

Membership Report. Brian Burgess

Membership renewals will fall due on the 1st September 2022 and can be paid at our monthly meetings, through our website or by post. Memberships numbers remain steady.

Fixtures Programme 2022-23. Jon Penn

Tuesday 13th September - Railways around Blaenau Ffestiniog by Simon Starr

Tuesday 11th October - Colour Rail by Paul Challoner

Tuesday 8th November - King's Cross to York by Stephen Gay

Tuesday 13th December - 1950s & 1960s Steam part 2 by David Maidment

Tuesday 10th January - AGM followed by film presentation by Jon Penn.

Tuesday 14th February - Merseyside Electrics by Charles Roberts.

Tuesday 14th March - Edge Hill Motive Power Depot by Dennis Flood

Tuesday 11th April - To be confirmed

Tuesday 9th May - To be confirmed

All meetings start at 7.45pm in the Gladstone Club, Station Road, Northwich, Cheshire, CW9 5RB.

Photo Puzzle.

Can you identify the location and the name of the crossing in this photograph. (Photo: Mike Lenz)



Answer at the bottom of page 14.

My Stint at Northwich Station. John Hilton

As a result of all the items in the MLS web page about Northwich Station Booking Office roof/wall collapse, I decided to put a few words together about Northwich Station.

Might I say at this point that what I am writing about happened sixty years ago and my memory is not as good as it used to be but I hope it will bring a smile to your faces! I should say that I am probably the only MLS member who ever worked on Northwich Station.

When my parents moved to Davenham I requested a transfer from Stockport and was posted to Acton Bridge as one of the box lads, the signalman's post was vacant so I worked with various relief men. I was 18 at the time. Dennis O'Reilley was the assistant to Mr Jones, the signalling inspector, and a gentleman. Both were both based at Northwich Station. They wanted me to work in one of the Cheshire Lines boxes, mostly Class 4. My response was "no" as, to use a modern term, I wanted a sabbatical from the signal box so I was put on relief at the stations. During this period I also relieved in the boxes on the main line, Winsford Jct., Acton Bridge and Weaver Jct. as box lad.

I don't exactly know when I ended up at Northwich Station or how long I was there. I had met the Station Master previously as he lived in Delamere next to my godfather's parents. He was a pleasant person whose name was Mr Rothwell. The crew I was put with was foreman Arthur, ticket collector Walter, porter Ken and in the ticket office was Colin. The signal lampman used to help out on the early shift that started at 06.00hr and ended at 14.30hr when the late shift started and lasted until 23.30hr. As far as I can remember all the offices were on the Manchester platform. The first one was the booking hall and office, there was also a waiting room. The other offices, in no particular order, were Station Master, signalmen's, inspector's, toilets, porter's room, then the lamp room and a couple of storage rooms.



Ivatt 2-6-2T No. 41226 at Northwich. 5th April 1961. (Photo: J Hilton/MLS Collection)

The first duty in the morning was the 'Parcels' from Crewe that had to be unloaded on to the delivery trucks. There were three and all the sorting was done by the drivers in the car park behind the booking office. One morning Colin got a bit excited and joined us in a bit of a rage throwing parcels all over the place with the sound of glass breaking. There must have been a few claims from that episode! The Parcels used to change locomotives and we sometimes got an ex-works loco that came off and returned to Crewe via Middlewich, light engine. One morning there was "nonsense" with the change-over as the fireman whose duty it was to couple up refused to do it so a shunter was requested but none were available. Arthur asked me but I unfortunately said "no" so when Rothwell arrived I was sent for and given a severe ticking off for not doing as I was asked by my foreman. Other than that, I was never in much trouble.

After the Monday morning rush-hour trains had all gone, it was time to go and move some of the single line keys from the West Cabin to the South Cabin. This was caused by there being more trains coming from, than going to, Middlewich, from the Hartford direction. Sandbach Junction Signal Box was at the east end of the triangle, so about 09.30 I would go to Sandbach Jct. to collect the magazine. This was a very heavy instrument and a lot heavier when it was full of the keys, so to make it a lot easier I found a wheel barrow and gave the instrument a ride. Fortunately, there was enough space at the side of the track for me to walk, being a photographer, my camera was always with me. Having itchy fingers, when in Sandbach Jct. when a bell rang I would answer it so long as the signalman didn't object, which never happened. If there was an opportunity to go

wandering then I was gone, perhaps into the shed area. A photo had to be taken if I saw a clean engine as it might not be there later. On one occasion I got into Northwich Central cabin. [*A location your editor spent many pleasant evenings in the early 1970s*] This was a unique box as it was 'special grade', the only one in the Northwich area. I was there for about an hour. To see the inside would make one wonder why was it special grade. Just outside the box was a set of points that had to be moved for every shunting movement that was made and it must have been moved a dozen times while I was there. If parcels came from Manchester or had to go in the Chester direction they were barrowed across the wooden crossing at the Manchester end of the platforms. This called for a banker to push up the platform ramp due to steepness.

Stanier 2-6-0 No. 42981 at Northwich. 8th April 1961. (Photo: J Hilton/MLS Collection)



On one occasion the training coach came to the shed so at the end of my shift I went and asked the guy doing the training if I could sit in. I found it fairly interesting but one of the firemen said something wrong and got his ear-hole wound up.

On one occasion Management started a new guy and first impressions were good. He spent a long time in the toilets scrubbing the wooden toilet seats until you could have breakfast off them. This went on for a few weeks and then one day the lamp man didn't turn in so they asked wonder boy to do the signal lamps. He needed the extra money and did a great job. The signals were much brighter than normal and they should have lasted a week but they started going out early. I never heard what happened over that.

Tommy Cooper, the comedian, was doing a show at the ICI and I was sent to greet him off the Manchester train. He had one of the biggest bags you could imagine and I struggled across the track with this and handed it to the ICI chauffeur. For all that effort he fished in his pocket pulled out a fist full of silver and gave me six and a half pence. Needless to say I didn't look at what he gave me until he left as I was quite happy to have met him, I always wondered whether he used it for a laugh in his show.

The afternoon shift was always pleasant for me. One day Arthur said to me "give me sixpence" as he had a good tip for a horse's double. After the race he gave me 30 bob, a very good return.

When it came time to put the gas lights on, rather than go and get the stick it was common practice to run and jump up at each lamp and pull the wire down being careful not to snatch and hurt the mantles. Occasionally it did happen. A couple of hours after supper it was off to the pub for a pint and a game of darts. It might have been called *The Railway* or similar name [*The Lion and Railway - Ed*] as it was on the corner just across the road from the car park. Arthur never came.

Robinson Class 04/8 2-8-0 No. 63805
at Northwich. 18th March 1961.
(Photo: J Hilton/MLS Collection)



The last two trains at night went to the sidings on the chord to Middlewich. I had to go with the last one and couple it to the one standing there for the morning rush hour. We had three guards. The one called Goodier was a bit of a 'Romeo' and used to chat up women and take them home in his car. So, when the train arrived he would take them to his car to wait for him while we shunted the train. What he got up to is anyone's guess! Bill Jeffs was one of the other guards. A very nice guy. I can't remember who the third one was.

At lunch time on the Saturday morning turn I had to strengthen a train that might have been to cater for the football fraternity in Manchester. At the end of the late shift, after making the station secure and all was well, we all left for home. I was on a moped and used to take the back roads to Davenham as I enjoyed the quietness away from all the traffic and very rarely saw anyone on my ride.

To conclude my stint as a relief porter I went and relieved at Winsford, Hartford, Acton Bridge all on the main line. This kept my camera busy. Then on the Cheshire I went to Plumley, Lostock Gralam, Hartford and Greenbank (as it was called then), Cuddington and Delamere. After a prolonged period, I returned to the to the box at Acton Bridge and Dennis O'Reilley put me in Plumley West Box.

That is another story if I ever get around to it!

Letter/email to the Editor.

Following the publication of the Winter 2022 journal with the photo of Southern Railway locomotive 'Lord Nelson' on the cover, I received the following email and photos from member Robert Meredith.

Hello Mike,

Thanks for sending the latest 8E Journal, the picture at Northwich takes me back as I am sure it does for you. I was involved with the loco while it was at Hereford, and when we went to Newport and back on the 19/11/83 and then prepared it for the trip to Northwich on the 26/11/83.

The loco started to develop a mud hole door leak when we left Hereford for Northwich which effected the efficiency of the loco during the day (needing a blow up at Delamere bank, [Mr Staite and Mr Ward were not happy] but we finally made it but not sure how late).

Can you remember we changed the mud hole seal, refilled the boiler and relit it ready for our trip to Carnforth on the Monday 28/11/83 hence the committee having a ride in GE1 behind it. Happy days. Unable to remember Clive's second name (*It was Barrow - Ed*) who was standing next to me.

Couple of pictures (below and opposite), leaving Shrewsbury, and moving the engine after the repairs to get it filled with coal to enable us to get back to Carnforth, plenty of 8E members getting a footplate ride, probably Raymondo (*aka Ray Towell - Ed*) on the Class 40, I wonder if the lad in the photo is now a 8E member?

Hope we can celebrate the anniversary this year.

Cheers
Bob



A few familiar faces in the saloon of GE1 on the journey to Carnforth from Northwich.

Robert Meredith is the gentleman holding the Welsh Marches Express headboard.



The view from the footplate of 'Lord Nelson' leaving Shrewsbury. (Photo: Bob Meredith)



A Class 40 shunting 'Lord Nelson' at Northwich following repairs. (Photo: Bob Meredith)

The Severn Tunnel - Part 2. Dennis Flood

In surveying the line of route that the Severn Tunnel was to take Hawkshaw found that the uneven bed of the Severn estuary presented a major problem that had escaped Richardson. The 'Centre Line' was eventually fixed after numerous soundings had been taken and a shaft was sunk to allow work to re-start. This shaft on the Monmouthshire side was to be 15 feet in diameter and 200 feet deep. It was to be lined with bricks. It was at this shaft that the first setback for Hawkshaw was encountered as only 45 feet had been sunk when 12,000 gallons of water per hour poured in from the subterranean spring. A steam pump was brought to the site and that countered the problem. However, during digging further down the shaft yet another spring made itself evident and more pumping operations were needed to deal with the inflow of 27,000 gallons of water per hour. Hawkshaw, Richardson and Walker were not prepared for even worse to come a considerable time later.

The intended depth of 200 feet was eventually reached and from the base of this first shaft a heading was driven under the Severn estuary but even more freshwater springs broke through to hinder the work but not stop it entirely. A pumping shaft was constructed next and when the work had been in progress over a period of six years there were four shafts on the Monmouthshire side and one on the Gloucestershire side and headings were being driven from four of the five shafts.

On one occasion water burst in through one of the Monmouthshire shafts and workers had to run for their lives. Any further work from the Welsh side of the Severn estuary was rendered impossible as a result of this sudden inflow of water. This is where a major problem became very apparent. The working on the site was now impossible to continue and it may have not been so serious had the heavy iron door, to hold back water from what was known as the 'Great Spring', been closed before workers had to flee for their lives prior to the inrush of water. This door had been placed in position for just such an eventuality. The closing of this door would have confined the swirling waters to one small area and allowed work to continue as the steam pumps cleared the affected shaft.

I have travelled down the Sudbrook main shaft by lift and then actually walked directly up to this door below the Severn Tunnel when I was doing some work at Sudbrook pumping station in 1987 – it was indeed a truly unforgettable experience.

The tunnel at its lowest depth had to be considerably lower than the proposed rail lines on land because of the falling gradients on both the English and Welsh sides of the River Severn. The approach to the Severn Tunnel thus slopes on both sides. The water from the disastrous 'Great Spring', which it was now known as by all concerned, filled the Sudbrook shaft completely and flooded the headings. The Sudbrook shaft was now full, all 200 feet of it. It was decided that if the iron door could be closed then water could be pumped out of the Sudbrook shaft and heading. It could then be held in check behind the iron door. However, the iron door was wide open, it must be closed before any work can re-start. If it can be closed it would then be possible to carry on with the tunnel construction work. How can it be done and, more importantly, who will close the iron door? It was the unanswered question. A volunteer was required to complete this most perilous of journeys under water.

It was clear that only a brave and courageous diver could now reach the iron door and close it. The 'Great Spring' was continuing to gush into the flooded headings discharging thousands of gallons of water. As this water from the 'Great Spring' was fresh water, local springs for miles around the tunnel construction site soon dried up. This was now becoming a social problem. However, 'cometh the hour cometh the man' and what a remarkable and very brave man he was. One Alexander Lambert. Please remember this remarkable man if you travel by train through the Severn Tunnel today. He deserves to be remembered just as much as Sir John Hawkshaw and Thomas Walker.

THE PERILOUS JOURNEY OF ALEXANDER LAMBERT.

Diving apparatus at the period of construction of the Severn Tunnel was very elementary, to say the least, and divers were not a common breed. A diver by the name of Alexander Lambert stepped forward and he readily volunteered to accept the dangerous task of closing the heavy iron door.

His diving apparatus in those days merely consisted of a 'goldfish bowl' helmet to which a flexible compressed air pipe was attached at the back of it. He was wearing a very rudimentary diving suit and a pair of sturdy gloves to keep his hands warm in the icy cold water!

Lambert made himself ready and was lowered into the water filled Sudbrook shaft. He groped his way into the inky darkness. Having been down the illuminated 200 feet deep Sudbrook shaft in the comfort a lift some 105 years later I am beyond admiration and praise for the courage and fortitude of Alexander Lambert – it is difficult to fully comprehend what he eventually achieved.

Lambert was unable to see anything as he made his way slowly towards the bottom of the shaft whilst his air pipe was fed out behind him and he sank lower into the water and, after reaching the bottom of the 200 foot deep shaft, further perils awaited him as he had to contend with numerous wheelbarrows, ladders and tools abandoned hastily by fleeing workers who had fled for their lives when the 'Great Spring' burst into the shaft and cascaded them with thousands of gallons of water rushing headlong towards them all.

Lambert was putting himself in mortal danger voluntarily. If any of the underwater debris he was struggling to get through was to snag his air pipe he would die an awful death. However, he went on.

It was the sheer weight and length of his compressed air pipe which he had to drag behind him through the water which eventually defeated him. He had reached a point only 30 yards from the iron door, which itself was very much further along the shaft heading and below the level of the Severn Tunnel we know today.

Reaching the bottom of the Sudbrook shaft was only the halfway stage of his perilous journey towards the open iron door. Lambert now had to make an equally dangerous journey back to the surface of the Sudbrook shaft but by this time he was physically exhausted.

However, 'fortune favours the brave' and he made the journey, after being so close to the iron door, back to the surface without mishap. Another diver, Henry Flues, who was the inventor of the 'diving dress' which dispensed with the cumbersome and long compressed air pipe and carried an oxygen tank strapped to his back volunteered to close the iron

door. Flues's 'diving dress' apparatus was a considerable advance on Lambert's cumbersome apparatus.

It was now the turn of Flues to attempt the closing of the iron door. Flues had increased mobility and both his hands were free to use during his attempt to close the iron door. Another brave man entered the water filled Sudbrook shaft and was to descend into the inky black darkness. However, the intense darkness within the shaft and the constant danger to him by abandoned wheelbarrows, ladders and tools was too much for Flues and he turned back and returned to the surface safely. Another brave man was defeated.

Alexander Lambert decided he would try again but this time using Flues's equipment. He tried several times but was not successful mainly due to unfamiliarity with the Flues equipment. He was not to be defeated and when he felt confident using the new 'diving dress' apparatus he finally succeeded in closing the heavy iron door. A very brave and courageous man had succeeded at last!

With the iron door closed work then started on improving the pumping apparatus and, after several months, part of the flooded workings were drained sufficiently to enable construction work to begin once more. Work then continued until the full length of the tunnel, excepting 300 yards of it still flooded by the 'Great Spring', were being worked in 1883 but still the 'Great Spring' broke through elsewhere yet again and 30,000 gallons of water per minute smashed through the workings. On this occasion, unfortunately, those workers who could not swim lost their lives.

More powerful pumps were brought into use and a side heading was cut from the foot of the Sudbrook shaft to form a drainage tunnel running parallel with but some distance from the actual 'Centre Line' of the tunnel.

THE 'GREAT SPRING' FINALLY TAMED.

As the length of this side heading was increased a point was then reached where the 'Great Spring' was located and finally tapped. The 'Great Spring' water took this new course and was drained away from the Severn Tunnel. After this was done the side heading where the water left the shaft was blocked up and once again work proceeded until completion of the tunnel in 1886.

However, this was not the end of the 'Great Spring' as previously thought. Trains had been running through the completed Severn Tunnel for some time when part of the tunnel brick lining was forced out by the sheer weight of water which had accumulated behind it. Pumps of considerably greater power were installed so that the 'Great Spring' could be dealt with once and for all. This was done and most of the 30,000,000 gallons of water a day which were then being pumped out were disposed of directly into the River Severn.

There was a snowstorm in 1881 which cut off coal supplies for three days and during that time the pumping engines were out of use and all work exterior to the tunnel had to cease. In that same year there was an inrush of water into the tunnel from the bed of the Severn estuary and in one location near the Gloucestershire side there was only about three feet of water above the tunnel at low tide. It was there that the water leak into the tunnel occurred and to find the exact location men linked hands and waded into the water until they found it. They then put great quantities of clay over the area and spread it out to form a barrier to any other potential leak.

There was another startling incident which occurred during the construction of the Severn Tunnel. There was flooding due to an exceptionally high tide driven by high winds during the darkness of an October night in 1885. This event created a 'tidal wave' of water so high it swamped the fires of the pumping engines. As a result of this, water entered the Sudbrook shaft and there were more than 80 men working below the shaft on that wild and stormy night. To rescue them from drowning a rowing boat had to be upended and lowered down the shaft and then launched on the turbulent flood water below it. The boat reached the men, who had by this time clambered onto the wooden staging which had been erected near the heading. They were all found alive and the boat returned them to the foot of the shaft. All of them were hauled to safety from the Sudbrook shaft and, following the last man to be rescued, the boat was also hauled up out of the water.

The first train ran through the Severn Tunnel on 9 January 1886 and it was a train of coal. Passenger trains commenced running in December 1886. The cost of building the Severn Tunnel was slightly under £2 million. Whilst a bridge may have been a cheaper option the building of a tunnel beneath the River Severn was the correct decision. Hindsight is always a wonderful thing. The opening of the Severn Tunnel enabled the Great Western Railway Company to shorten journey times from London Paddington to South Wales by use of a direct route via Patchway instead of Gloucester, which was part of the original route from London to South Wales, and it allowed trains to travel from the South West to South Wales via Patchway instead of via Gloucester. It is interesting to note that in 1887 – one year after the Severn Tunnel opened for traffic – 7,500 trains had used it and by 1917 23,000 trains had used it. The rapid increase in traffic up to 1917 reflects the important role of the Severn Tunnel during WW1.

One significant point about the opening of the Severn Tunnel and the finances of Great Western Railway Company, who financed the building of the Severn Tunnel to reduce the journey times between London Paddington and the South West to South Wales and thus the distance travelled, was that they were permitted to charge those passengers travelling to South Wales from London Paddington or from the South West an additional payment when travelling between Patchway and Severn Tunnel Junction. This was for a period of two years from the opening of the Severn Tunnel in 1886, to offset the loss of revenue to the Great Western Railway Company due to the lower ticket price via Patchway than if the train had travelled via Gloucester, as they had done prior to the opening of the Severn Tunnel! The Great Western Railway was not only an eminent railway company but they had a very efficient Chief Accountant as well! The time taken to travel through the Severn Tunnel today is less than five minutes but it took 13 years to construct. The maximum permitted line speed through the Severn Tunnel in both directions is currently 75mph. It is, therefore, easy to forget the tremendous undertaking it really is.

It is a remarkable civil engineering achievement by the men who constructed it and the achievement of which has not been dimmed with the passage of time.

It is still an important passenger and freight link between England and Wales, despite the presence of the M4 motorway. The spirit of Alexander Lambert remains. There will be a second article to complement this one for inclusion in a future 8E Association Journal. I will highlight the role of Sudbrook Pumping Station engineering staff and the Severn Tunnel Emergency Train – and my part in it.

Obituary- Wayne Jones. David Hawkes

Some reflections on Wayne Jones.

As most of you will know Wayne had been unwell for some time and died on 2nd April, 2020, just after the first lockdown due to the pandemic. However, it was only this year, exactly two years after his death, that a memorial celebration could be held. Unfortunately, this was in the Eastleigh Railway Institute, which precluded attendance by most of his friends in the 8E Railway Association. I have family in the area so we decided to combine a visit to them with the celebration.

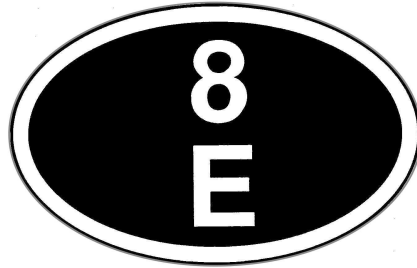
Our first impression was of surprise at how many people were present, perhaps around one hundred. The only person I knew was Janet, Wayne's wife, whom I had met a number of times when collecting Wayne for 8E meetings. However, we were warmly greeted by his daughter, Holly. There were, of course, several speeches which helped to give a picture of the man. We were also struck by the resemblance between Wayne and his brother, Dean. They could have been twins! He was brought up in a house with a railway line at the bottom of the garden and this triggered his love of steam. He did an engineering apprenticeship and then got a job in Eastleigh locomotive works. With privatisation he left British Rail and joined an enterprise involved with main line steam. He set up his own company in 2005. He was a very practical man and enjoyed getting his hands dirty. I am sure many of us have one of his pens with a light at the end! He was also very keen on motorbikes, having been known to do wheelies and having been reprimanded by the police for other stunts! He was also a keen photographer. He had a large, extended family (his mother was one of ten children) and was married three times. He was very much a people person and would have enjoyed a gathering such as this. Much was made of his love of wine and we all know he enjoyed a cigar.

I first met him at meetings of the Middlewich Rail-Link Campaign (or Mid-Cheshire RLC as it has become) and introduced him to the 8E. He had fingers in all sorts of other pies (British Legion, Rotary Club, Freemasons, Crewe Dinner Association, etc.) and always tried to be helpful. However, it seemed to me that sometimes he overstretched himself and could not devote the time required. I have no doubt we will remember him for his knowledge of railways, particularly all things Southern, and his frequent comments (usually very informed) during meetings. He had an extensive model railway, Southern of course, with two stations, Eastwich and Middleleigh to acknowledge his two main hometowns.

I always thought of him as a gentle man, a real gentleman. I find it sad that another link with the past has gone, but I will always remember his kindness.



Photo Puzzle: The location is Red Cow Crossing alongside Exeter Middle Box seen here in the early 1980s before the resignalling took place in 1985. The crossing remains today but the box



The 8E Railway Association

Founded 1981

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On Shed Journal

Contributions for future issues are welcomed.
Please submit these to the editor at the monthly meeting or by email to the address below.

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[Rear Cover: Class 52 locomotive D1048 'Western Lady' seen here at Laira Depot in the 1970s. (Photo: From the late Ray Towell collection.)

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