



On Shed

The Journal of the 8E Railway Association



£1

Winter 2020

Welcome

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

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[Front Cover: National Collection owned former LMS Black Five locomotive number 5000 seen at Northwich shed in May 1980 attending the Open Day organised by the then Area Manager, David Macintosh which sowed the seeds for the forming of the 8E Association. (Photo: Mike Lenz)

This page: Southern Railway 4-6-0 locomotive number 850 'Lord Nelson' seen in Northwich shed late at night with our current Chairman present on the footplate. (Photo: Mike Lenz)

From the Editor. Mike Lenz

Welcome to the winter issue of 'On Shed'. This year marks the fortieth anniversary of the 'Rocket 150' celebrations, and prior to that event, the Open Day at Northwich Shed which was to eventually lead to the formation of our Association.

I hope some of the images in this issue will bring back some of those memories for those enthusiasts who were fortunate enough to be able to attend these events. I was able to visit on the morning of the Open Day but had a model railway club meeting in Macclesfield that afternoon so unfortunately missed the running of the 'Black Five' on the ICI Hoppers. For those of you who attended our September 2019 meeting where new member, Dennis Flood, gave a presentation about his early days on the railway I am pleased to say that in this issue we begin an ongoing series of articles relating to his railway career, and if his presentation was anything to go by, should prove a most entertaining read. We are now half way through our new season of events and we are already putting together the fixtures for 2020/21.

Next year will see the Association celebrate its 40th Anniversary of which plans are being made at the current time to celebrate this milestone in some way for the benefit of the membership.

Contributions to the next issue are always welcome and should reach the editor by June 21st at the latest.

Chairman's Report. Mike Lenz

Our AGM took place on January 14th and my Chairman's report together with the financial report can now be found in the member's area of the website. All current committee members offered themselves for re-election and were unanimously voted back in en bloc. Under Any Other Business I brought to the attention of those present the fact that next year (2021) sees the 40th Anniversary of the founding of the Association. I suggested that this milestone deserved commemorating in some way and asked the membership to come up with some ideas. One idea that I was looking at was the possibility of hiring the observation saloon on the Severn Valley Railway for a day riding behind either steam or possibly a diesel hydraulic locomotive. If you have any other suggestions then please let me or one of my fellow committee members know.

The meeting was followed by another excellent presentation by Jon Penn.

Membership Report. Brian Burgess

Following the sending out of membership renewals most members have renewed and membership remains stable, the following being the breakdown of numbers;

Life/Honorary Life Members: 21. Full members: 37.

Photo Spot.



December 2019 saw the end of the Virgin Trains West Coast Franchise and a new operator taking over the services under the new name Avanti West Coast. Here we have the first of the Pendolino trains (390 156) to receive its new owners livery, seen here passing North Junction signal box on Monday 9th December 2019. (Photos: Mike Lenz)



Fixtures Programme 2019-2020. Jon Penn

Tuesday 11th February - Peter Dixon - Preservation through my eyes.

Tuesday 10th March - Gordon Davies - American Wanderings - Heading West

Tuesday 14th April - Slide Presentation - Les Nixon.

Tuesday 12th May - John Cowlshaw - Termini (Part 2).

Tuesday 9th June - Social Evening - Location to be confirmed

All the above at the Gladstone Club, Station Road, Northwich, CW9 5RB

Commencing at 7.45pm. Admission for first-time guests is FREE, subsequent meeting entrance fee is £3. Sandwiches provided free of charge.

Photo Puzzle.

Can you identify the location in this photograph taken during one of our past 8E Days Out. Answer on page 14. (Photo: Mike Lenz)



Memories of Birkenhead Mollington Street MPD, the Men and the Area. Part 1. Dennis Flood

(Author's Note: This article was first written in November 2015.)

It is significant that I find myself putting together this article almost exactly 30 years after the closure of the depot in November 1985. How appropriate that is!

Birkenhead Shed was the furthest outpost of the Great Western Railway and a depot was opened on the site at Mollington Street in 1878 and was under the joint control of the London & North Western Railway and the Great Western Railway. (LNWR/GWR Joint Railway). As a result, both companies had their own depots with the LNWR having an *eight-road* shed, with a coaling stage and turntable and the GWR also having an eight-road shed, coaling stage and turntable.

Nationalisation in 1948 saw the LMS/GWR depot (the LNWR shed had been absorbed by the LMS in 1922) taken under the control of the London Midland Region of British Railways with the shed code 6C and this then, some years later, became 8H. In 1951, the former LMS (LNWR) shed was reduced in size and a new diesel shed comprising of 2 roads was built, these roads were numbered and subsequently were known as No.1 and No.2 diesel shed roads with No.2 road being the nearest to the former LMS steam shed. A depot fuel point was also provided. In 1951, three years after British Railways came into existence the opportunity was taken to amalgamate the similar functions of clerical staff and messing facilities at both the former LMS and GWR depots into one entity, using the facilities available at the former LMS depot. As can be imagined, this did not impress the former GWR staff at Birkenhead since they maintained that upon arrival with a locomotive, or taking one off the shed from the former GWR depot, they had to walk further after booking on/off duty at the former LMS shed! In order to make things easier for ex. GWR drivers and Firemen, and to pacify them, a simple solution was found, namely a hole was made in the supporting retaining wall between the two sheds to allow the men to take a short cut to the former LMS shed so they could book off duty, put engine repair cards in, or use the mess facilities there! For some years afterwards, the former GWR men were known as the 'hole in the wall gang'! Some years later a locker room was situated between the two former LMS/GWR depots and the hole was finally bricked up. However, the 'new' brickwork could still clearly be seen at the time of final closure of the depot in November, 1985. Evidence and memories of the 'hole in the wall gang' were no more! I have always thought that it is the men (and women) who make a depot and not the other way around.

Birkenhead Mollington Street was a remarkable place to work at and I must say that there were some equally quite remarkable characters there as well! I was fortunate to have been a driver at Mollington Street before moving on to other positions within British Railways and I would like to share some of the quite hilarious things which some of them did during my time there during the course of a few of these written articles.



Birkenhead Mollington Street seen here in the latter years of BR steam. (Photo courtesy: Kerry Parker)

This is true, of course, of all Sheds and those former drivers and firemen who may be reading this article will concur with that view having known their own 'characters' at their respective depots, they may have even been 'characters' themselves! I will also give mention to Guards, Shunters and others in due course as well, since they all played an important role in the day to day operation of the railway and some were equally as 'mad' as the drivers, if not more so!

Birkenhead Mollington Street was a cosmopolitan mixture of men from numerous depots which had closed at the end, or near the end, of steam in the mid and late 1960s. There were former Edge Hill/Bank Hall/Brunswick/Aintree/Walton on the Hill and Speke Junction men there, this influx of men from Liverpool depots made the place seem like a comedy store, and the input from the Birkenhead men just made the entire place appear to be a laugh a minute! There were also ex. Carlisle Kingmoor/Lostock Hall/Wigan Springs Branch/Chester/Crewe/Abergavenny and Holyhead men there, as well. The vast majority of the men there, like all depots, were responsible men who did their jobs very professionally. A finer body of men I could not have wished to work with.

The Link structure for drivers at Birkenhead was quite straightforward and did not really change a great deal, at the time I was there, as most of the work remained quite constant. A 'Link' being a fixed number of drivers with a fixed amount of work in weekly order and this rotated each week so that a driver took the next weeks line of work in his link. There was a DMU Link, which contained the senior drivers at the depot and this contained 10

drivers. Then there were 3 Goods Links comprising Links,1,2 and 3 and each of them contained 15 senior drivers. There was also a driver's Shed Link and this was known as the Bank Head Link and it comprised of the three standard shifts of 0700-1500/1500-2300 & 23-00-0700 Monday-Friday and 0700-1500/1500-2300 Saturdays Only. There were three regular 'medically restricted' drivers in the Shed Link, one of whom, Driver Jack Baker (originally from Abergavenny), was a Mr. Pickwick character straight out of a Charles Dickens novel, and he could peel a whole orange whilst it was still in his pocket, and then offer you a piece of it covered in his oily finger marks. I always politely declined! There was no Saturday night 2300 shed turn at Birkenhead but a driver booked on at 0001-0800/0800-1600 and 1600-2400 on a Sunday to cover shed duties. All these diagrams, as they were called, also had a shed secondman booking on at the same time as the driver. The largest drivers Link at Mollington Street was the 'Extra Link' and this contained 47 drivers, including yours truly. Drivers in this Link were always shown 'spare' and would be marked in the link, for example, as 1400 Spl or 1500 Spl. The letters 'Spl' simply meant 'Special', in other words, book on as you are told!

The depot Roster Clerk would roster men from the Extra Link to cover vacant work in the DMU, Goods and Shed Links when drivers were either on leave or off sick, for example. He kept a book called the 'Lame, Sick and Lazy' book and used that when rostering cover for those who were 'unavailable'! The Supervisor also had access to this book. The Extra Link was, in my opinion, the best Link at the depot since we had a wide variety of work and route knowledge to go with it! Extra Link drivers also covered work on the Mersey/Wirral d.c. electrified system, or the 'Inter-Villages' as we called it! There were two depots covering the Liverpool Area d.c. electrified railway on the Wirral and they were located at Birkenhead North and Birkenhead Central. We also used to refer to these services as 'The Sparks'! Birkenhead North was simply known as 'North' and contained drivers who covered work specifically to New Brighton and West Kirby. These drivers were known as the 'Wirral' men. Birkenhead Central, known to all as just 'BC' covered work between Rock Ferry and Liverpool Central and these drivers were known as the 'Mersey' men. Drivers from both these depots worked over the entire Wirral d.c. electrified network, it can now be appreciated why we called the services the 'Inter Villages'! It is worth mentioning at this point that Mollington Street was also known as the 'South Shed' to differentiate it from the depots at 'North' and 'BC'. The 'South Shed' always provided driver cover for both 'North' and 'BC'. Men at 'North' and 'BC' only ever worked d.c. electrified services, as that is all they were trained to carry out.

In the days of the Wirral Railway and Mersey Railway, at the introduction of the electric service to Liverpool, drivers were known as 'Motormen'. A few of them used to be known as 'Motormouth'!

If a freight job was cancelled at Mollington Street and the driver was in one of the three Goods Links he could be required to work on the 'Inter Villages' as well, this was normally followed by a loud explosion of annoyance if the Supervisor sent him 'down below' to Birkenhead Central or Birkenhead North! Expletives were usually mixed with 'I am a senior

man doing a junior mans work' followed by a bit more ranting and raving but when the Supervisor said 'Book the12' (Book 12 hours pay for the turn) calm was nearly always restored in an instant! The way to a senior drivers' heart, in those days, was through his wallet! There was a separate Link for 'Secondmen' at Mollington Street, which was the term given to replace the word 'Fireman' as diesel traction was introduced, and this comprised of some 50 secondmen in the Link. I am not entirely certain of that figure after the passing of many years but it will not be too far out. This Link was the 'Line of Promotion' from Secondman to 'Passed Secondman' (previously 'Passed Fireman') and then to Driver. The 'Line of Promotion' was safeguarded for secondmen. Only a secondman could eventually become a driver in those days and this was not to change on British Railways until the 'Trainman's Concept' was introduced by the British Railways Board and agreed by Trade Unions in 1988. There were some first class men from this link who went on to become drivers and to take other roles within the railway industry and do well for themselves, as did some drivers.



Class 25 and 47 locomotives seen awaiting their next duties at Mollington Street during the BR Blue era. (Photo courtesy: Kerry Packer)

An amusing anecdotal story about this Link was that it was named the 'Ghost Link' by the depot Boss in my time at Mollington Street, Mr. Jack Barford, a wonderful man and a gentleman to all who knew him. I asked him one day why the Secondman's Link was called the 'Ghost Link' and his reply was 'because some of those Secondmen in that Link can just disappear into thin air when they are in work, never to be seen again! Even a gentleman can shout at times! He originally came from Stoke and one of the drivers at Birkenhead said to him one day, that the last time he saw a Stoke driver he was pulling around a brake van and a truck full of strawberries! This was a driver's way of being disparaging of work at other depots, but it was always said in jest...at least, I think it was! His reply to the driver was quite direct...'The reason why a Stoke man pulls a truck full of strawberries around the railway is so that a Birkenhead man can sit on his a..e doing

nothing all day sitting in the mess room scoffing them! Even a gentleman was known to swear at times! What a Boss he was! It was he who set me on my way to numerous management positions within the railway industry some years later...

The work that we had at Mollington Street was regular but unspectacular. Drivers, guards and secondmen worked to Etruria near Stoke and Croes Newydd at Wrexham with trains of iron ore from Birkenhead Docks for Shelton and Brymbo steelworks respectively. Northwich/Crewe/Preston/Preston Dock/Warrington/Guide Bridge/Dewsnap Sidings and Godley Junction were regular work locations for Birkenhead men. Shrewsbury was also a regular location to work to with the Aberystwyth tanks from Stanlow and also Whittington, near Gobowen. Dee Marsh Curve Sidings (near Sealand) was also a location where we worked trains to Warrington and Godley Junction (for Wath). The iron ore services from Bidston Dock to Shotwick sidings were worked by Birkenhead men after Bidston Shed closed in the early 1960s. There were five regular guards based at Bidston Dock (North Side) who worked the iron ore services with Birkenhead drivers. There were two brothers based at Bidston Dock, Ernie and Benny Griffiths, both guards and the best of them there, who were excellent. These two men were a joy to work with. They were very efficient, reliable and knew exactly what they were doing. Apart from being the first class men that they were, they would also make out the driver's 'ticket' each time you worked with them. The driver's 'ticket' was, in essence, a work sheet showing the duties performed during the shift, and who had relieved whom (and based at what depot) plus the locomotive/trains worked and any unusual occurrences outside the drivers diagrammed work. Ernie and Benny were the only two guards who did this, they were marvellous individuals. A credit to their grade.

When the iron ore services finished in 1980 upon closure of Shotton Steelworks, Ernie became a Chargeman at Birkenhead Park Station and later, his brother Benny also became a Chargeman at Birkenhead Duke Street. There was a driver based regularly at Duke Street on the 'Pilot' locomotive and his name was Bobby Smart. Bobby was so slow that you used to become tired just watching him as he had had one pace, dead slow! We never could quite work out which was the slowest, Bobby or the 350hp shunting locomotive...it was a close run thing...if he did more than 3 mph driving the locomotive he would get a nose bleed! He worked the three shifts at Birkenhead Duke Street 0600/1400, 1400/2200 and 2200/0600. He occasionally worked the 0600/1400 Saturday morning shift, if he could get out of bed, that is! He was the only driver at Birkenhead who could oversleep on the 1400/2200 shift! Many was the time that one of the Duke Street shunting staff would go around to his house and wake him up, at 1345! For all that, Bobby was a likeable fellow, and he would not upset anyone or harm a soul, just drive shunting staff 'up the wall' at his nice, steady and regular slow pace...just the thing a shunter needs when it's pouring down with rain! He was an ASLE&F member but one shunter said he should join the NUR instead – No Use Rushing!

I remember working with a guard who I will just call Guard B.B. – he is still about but he is no longer working within the railway industry, having left many years ago. This is probably just as well. These days we would probably describe him then as being 'unhinged'! He was a total lunatic, in his own way, and as a driver you never quite knew what he was

going to do, but then, neither did he! At Stanlow Ground Frame (GF), there was a shunter nicknamed 'The Hogg' because he kept a smallholding of pigs, and he smelt like one too! Mr.B.B didn't like him much because of his 'aroma' and thought, one day, to have a bit of fun... We had just arrived at Stanlow Ground Frame with a 'light' locomotive from Mollington Street and we were due to work to Preston Dock. Adjacent to my locomotive was a train of tanks about to depart for Haydock, in charge of one driver James J. Brooks. (More about Jimmy in another article...a comedian's comedian, hilarious!). Mr.B.B attached the locomotive to our train and, following a brake continuity test, he proceeded to get the necessary paperwork from 'The Hogg'. He went into the cabin where 'The Hogg' was located, and wearing a peg on his nose, was given the train paperwork and driver's slip (which gave details of train weight, brake force available, length limit and speed, amongst other things and was to be handed to the train driver prior to departure). 'The Hogg' ignored this 'peg' on the nose gesture and Mr.B.B. departed the cabin to return to the locomotive, where I was waiting. "Now driver" he said "Once Brooksy has left we're next out!" "Thank you" says I, whereupon Mr.B.B. poured me out a nice cup of tea...whilst we waited. Now it must be said that 'The Hogg' always wore a pair of green wellies when on duty, either having arrived from his small holding before taking duty or going there when his duty was completed...on this occasion he had taken them off and they were near his locker. Probably to just change his socks, after a fortnight! Driver Brooks duly propelled his train out from Stanlow onto the main line between Ellesmere Port and Helsby, and after coming to a stand and then receiving the signal to start from 'The Hogg', duly opened up his two Type 2 locomotives... They began to roar off, sounding like a thousand bomber raid over Berlin! As he roared passed me, still within the siding complex and waiting for my turn to depart, and exchanging appropriate pleasantries by playing a tune only he knew on the leading locomotive horn, off he went towards Helsby to commence his journey to Haydock. As the train sped past me, with a load of 10 x 100 tanks, I noticed on the rear drawbar hook of the last wagon in the train a pair of green wellies swinging around with great gusto...I was just about to speak the Mr.B.B. about this when he promptly stood up in the driving cab of the locomotive, opened the door on my side and shouted as loud as he could..."Give it the wellie, Jimmy...yahoo!" Very definitely 'unhinged'! 'The Hogg' had seen his wellies disappear passed his cabin on the drawbar hook of the last wagon and contacted the Signaller at Stanlow & Thornton to stop the train to recover his wellies! This was done and the Chargehand at Stanlow & Thornton very shortly afterwards walked over to Stanlow and Thornton Station and gave them to the driver of a Helsby to Rock Ferry DMU service, who then promptly threw them over the chain-link fence as he was passing Stanlow GF with the DMU and they were re-united with their grateful owner, all done in the space of about 20 minutes. What the passengers on the DMU made of all this was anybody's guess! Mr.B.B. was one of many who I worked with at Birkenhead who could be said to be somewhat 'unhinged'! Then there was Bill Symonds, who was known as 'Wobble Gobble' and he had a penchant for setting fire to the 'Liverpool Echo' or the 'Bebington News' prior to taking up night duty at Stanlow Ground Frame and Guard 'The Noble' Arthur Dane, known as 'Kwai Chang Dane' because he thought, in his own mind, that he was a karate expert...but that is another story!

To be continued...

Northwich Open Day 1980.



Above we see NRM owned LMS 'Black Five' 5000, at that time based at the Severn Valley Railway, seen here with the then Area Manager, David Macintosh, speaking to the driver. Below we see BR Standard Class 2-6-4 Tank locomotive 80079, also based at the SVR, standing on number 1 shed road. (Photos: Gary Brookes)





Above we see Merchant Navy Class Pacific 35028 'Clan Line' top and tailing with LNER A4 Pacific 4498 'Sir Nigel Gresley' on the shuttle service between Northwich and Lostock ICI Works. (Photo: Gary Brookes)

Below we see LMS 'Black Five' 5000 assisting a Class 25 with the ICI limestone hoppers bound for ICI Winnington during the afternoon of the Open Day. (Photo: 8E Archive)



Book Review. Mike Lenz

For all those with an interest in the diesel hydraulic locomotives of the Western Region, which I know includes a number of our own members, this new book by Adrian Curtis, Paul Robinson and the Western Locomotive Research Society should be just the ticket, so to speak.

This is the third of the trilogy of books and covers the Disposal Records for all 74 locomotives and is profusely illustrated throughout its 134 pages. The photos are predominately colour with just a handful of black and white images, most of which show the locomotives either in their last few days of operation or withdrawn in the works at Swindon and in various states of scrapping, with the exception being the seven preserved examples.

Had diesel preservation been more prominent in the mid to late 70s, how many more of these locomotives might have been saved, especially when you look at how many Class 50 are now in preservation out of the original 50 locomotives built.

Nevertheless we should be thankful that there are still opportunities to travel behind these wonderful locomotives both on preserved railways and even on the main line network once more.

The book is published by Track Record Press and is priced at £27.99 and can be purchased online at www.westernlocomotiveresearchsociety.com along with many other Western titles by Adrian Curtis.

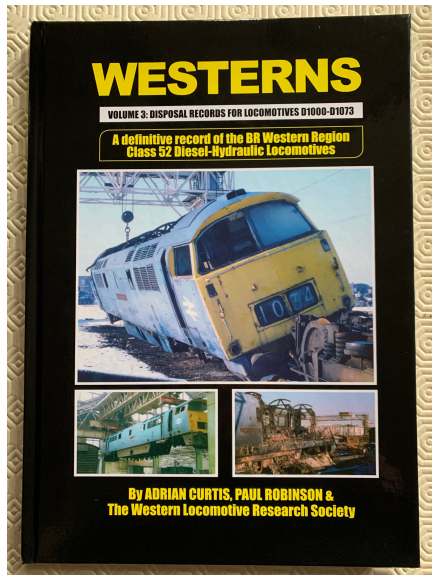
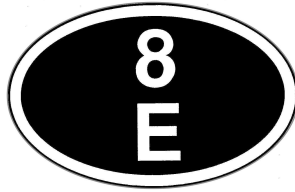


PHOTO PUZZLE: The bricked up tunnel mouth at Birkenhead Riverside. (Photo: Mike Lenz)



The 8E Railway Association

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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 24 number 24030 stands on number 3 road outside Northwich shed in the early 1980s. Photo: Gary Brookes]

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