



On Shed

The Journal of the 8E Railway Association



£1

Winter 2021

Welcome

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

In This Issue

From the Editor

Chairman's Report

Membership Report

More Northwich Memories (Photo feature)

Fixtures Programme

Photo Puzzle

Memories of Birkenhead Mollington Street MPD,
The Men and the Area. Part 2.

Gone but not forgotten (Photo feature)

Travelling to 8E: A Continuing Journey

Contact Information

[Front Cover: Brand new Class 68 # 68031 seen at Crewe Heritage Centre in July 2007 during a gala weekend. (Photo: Mike Lenz)

This page: Nameplate and Crest of preserved BR West Country Light Pacific #34046 "Braunton" seen on shed at the former Crewe Diesel Depot now the home of Locomotive Services. (Photo: Mike Lenz)

From the Editor. Mike Lenz

A Happy New Year to all our members and readers, hopefully 2021 will see a return to more normal times and we can once again meet on a regular basis.

July this year marks the start of our 40th Anniversary which we hope to celebrate in some suitable way, though the current situation with the ongoing pandemic makes planning difficult to say the least. I would welcome any articles or photographs from members about their recollections of the early years of the group and hope to do several features in the next two issues recalling some of those early years.

All contributions for the summer issue to reach me by June 21st 2021.

Chairman's Report. Mike Lenz

As members are now aware we were unable to hold our AGM in the normal manner so had to resort to a postal format. I have received the results from our secretary and was somewhat disappointed by the sheer number of members who did not respond to the request for votes, especially when 80% of our membership have email addresses and merely needed to reply by the same method.

We therefore assume that all members are in favour of accepting the seven items upon which they were asked to vote as follows;

- 1) The minutes from the January 2020 AGM.
- 2) The 2019/2020 Year end accounts.
- 3) The re-election of the current committee en bloc.
- 4) The election of Roger Morris as a Vice-Chairman.
- 5) The election of Dennis Flood as a Vice Chairman.
- 6) The election of Steve Blakemore to the committee.

I would like to thank those members who did respond and say that hopefully we will be able to hold our next AGM in the normal manner.

At the time of writing we are now in a third lockdown and as a result it is difficult to make any plans at the present time to celebrate our 40th Anniversary which commences in July this year. I am hoping that by the early summer we will have a clearer view of the situation and we can then make plans for a more suitable means to celebrate our anniversary. Until then please take care out there and I look forward to when we can resume our activities once more.

Membership Report. Brian Burgess

As has been mentioned by our Chairman, membership renewals will be deferred for another year until August 2021. The following being the breakdown of numbers;

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

More Northwich memories.

Here we see a pair of Class 20 locomotives (20162 & 20164) with the loaded hoppers for ICI with the old goods shed in the background, now the site of the Tesco supermarket.



Below we see an unidentified Class 40 approaching Northwich with a train of chemical tankers from ICI. (All photos from the late Ray Towell Collection)



Fixtures Programme 2020-2021. Jon Penn

At the present time your committee has decided that we will not hold any meeting this season and look to start afresh from September 2021. We are monitoring the situation month by month and should there be a substantial improvement then we may look at the possibility of a summer day/evening trip out in the June-August period.

Any changes will be shown on the website and Facebook page.

In the mean time please do take care.

Photo Puzzle.



Can you identify the location in this photograph of a Class 52 locomotive number D1023 Western Fusilier (now preserved as part of the National Collection). (Photo: The Ray Towell Collection)

Answer at the bottom of page 14.

Memories of Birkenhead Mollington Street MPD, the Men and the Area. Part 2.

By Dennis Flood

The second part of this article must start with two quite individual characters who I had the good fortune to work with as a driver during my time at Birkenhead Mollington Street. The first one was Bill Symonds, otherwise known as `Wobble-Gobble` because of the way he rapidly moved his mouth as he spoke. Bill was a Chageman at Stanlow Ground Frame and was in day-to-day charge of fuel train movements out of Stanlow Refinery, near a location called `The Fuel Rack`. `The Fuel Rack` was where railway tank vehicles were berthed and filled with fuel before onward movement to various parts of the country. Trains went from Stanlow to such diverse places as Salfords, near Gatwick Airport (aviation fuel), Rowley Regis and Bilston, in the West Midlands, Padiham, Preston Dock and Ulverston in Lancashire, Whittington, near Shrewsbury and Aberystwyth, Ravenhead and Cowley Hill (to serve the large Pilkingtons glass making plant in St.Helens) and many more locations. More about those services in later articles.

Bill Symonds lived in Bebington and when he was working a night shift at Stanlow Ground Frame, usually one week in three, the regular comical saga would take place...

Bill would ring up the Train Crew Supervisor (TCS) at Mollington Street at about 2100 hours each weekday evening when he was on nights and enquire about having a lift on a light locomotive bound for Ellesmere Port or Stanlow to take him into work. There was a regular light locomotive movement off Mollington Street depot at about 2115 each night during the week and this locomotive worked a return empty coal train from Ellesmere Port to Bestwood Park, located in the Nottinghamshire coalfield. The driver was advised by the TCS to stop and pick Bill up at Bebington and give him a lift to work. I was the driver on many occasions over the years working this particular job and had the hilarious good fortune to pick Bill up at Bebington on several occasions. After departure from Mollington Street and then passing through Rock Ferry there is a small cutting between Rock and Bebington and at this point a gentle `toot` on the locomotive horn was sounded to let Bill know of the approach of the locomotive towards Bebington Station. The locomotive marker lights at the front end were quite dim and could not be easily seen, hence the gentle `toot` on the locomotive horn. At this point, Bill could be seen standing on the up platform at Bebington in the dim lights of the station, ready and waiting. However, to ensure that the driver saw him and didn't forget to stop (which did happen occasionally!) Bill would set fire to his copy of the `Liverpool Echo` or `Bebington News` and wave it up and down like a demented fire lighter. He preferred the `Liverpool Echo` because it had more pages to burn, at this point, the burning newspaper would go up like a tinder box as the locomotive approached the platform, Bill would then be seen dancing around on the platform stamping the blazing newspaper out with his boots, like a manic Morris dancer! The resultant fireball was always a sight to see. Even though all drivers confirmed with him that they were on the same job all week and would stop at Bebington to pick him up it made no difference as this pyrotechnic display always took place with Bill. What passengers waiting on the down platform at Bebington made of this is anybody's guess! On one occasion a driver stopped at Bebington and blasted Bill and his blazing `Liverpool Echo` with a CO2 fire extinguisher and chased him around the platform just for the fun of it...there was CO2 gas everywhere and Bill was not at all impressed!

The next individual to mention is guard Arthur Dane.

Arthur was a regular DMU guard during my time at Mollington Street and he had one of the most remarkable story-telling imaginations that could be imagined and he believed most of them himself. He used to tell anyone who would listen that he was a karate black belt and that his hands were 'lethal weapons' and if a passenger upset him he would have to advise them of this fact before he 'chopped them up'! The number of occasions I worked with Arthur and witnessed the altercations he became involved in with passengers I have lost count.

The last train from Chester to Rock Ferry on a Saturday night, the 2245 departure from Chester, was a case in point. There was always those on this train who were a little the worse for wear, shall we say, and it would be only a matter of time before Arthur would be involved in a row with several of them who refused to pay their fare. He would always quote Railway By-Laws at them and their replies usually doubted his parentage. At this point, Arthur would start to quote his karate black belt prowess and how it would be wise of them to pay their fare, he never did anything because he knew he couldn't, the only black belt Arthur had was holding up his trousers! I well remember him trying to stop an argument between a husband and wife who were shouting and bawling at each other and Arthur decided to intervene. This was definitely not one of his best decisions as these pair were regulars who travelled on the 2245 from Chester General to Upton-by-Chester and shouted and bawled at each other constantly and then alighted at Upton Station and walked away hand in hand as if nothing had happened. He intervened with the result that the woman set about Arthur with her handbag, bashing him over the head with it as he tried in vain to 'chop it up' with his karate skill! This was a sight to see, especially as other passengers on the train who were also the worse for wear encouraged her. When we arrived back at Rock Ferry, I reminded him that those 'lethal weapon' hands of his didn't do him much good and his reply was 'If she'd have carried on much longer I'd have definitely chopped up that handbag!' There was never a dull moment working with Arthur. Those of a certain age reading this article may be able to remember a programme on the television called 'Kung Fu' shown in the 1970s and the leading actor played the role of an individual called 'Kwai Chang Cane'. As a result of this programme, Arthur was given the immortal nickname of 'Kwai Chang Dane'!



Mollington Street MPD with classes 25, 37 and 47 present. (Photo: Mick Pope)

Now, a word about the Train Crew Supervisors at Mollington Street during my time there – Tom Bainbridge, George Siddorns, Alec `Angus` McDonald and Alec Allen. These four individuals were in charge of the day-to-day running of the depot and reported to Mr. Jack Barford the Depot Shedmaster, or to give him his full title of Assistant Area Manager (Traincrews). Tom Bainbridge was an ex. Edge Hill man and he stood in as the boss for Jack Barford when he was away. Tom was a superb railwayman and achieved something at Edge Hill MPD that was unheard of in steam days, he was appointed as a Deputy TCS whilst he was still a fireman there. A position such as this was normally only given to a driver. This grade would be similar to what was called an `Outside Foreman` at a Steam MPD – there was also an `Inside Foreman` who would be in charge on a daily basis, the `Outside Foreman` being, effectively, the `junior` man. Towards the end of the steam era the titles were dropped in favour of the term Train Crew Supervisor or Inspector (TCS or TCI). At Birkenhead, the regular Supervisors were called TCIs. Tom's nickname at both Edge Hill and Mollington Street was `Pencil and Paper` because he was always constantly making notes or writing items down. This was a man who spent some 20 years as a fireman in the `Top Link` at Edge Hill and worked all the `double-home` jobs there. Tom was an out and out Stanier Pacific man, he loved working on those magnificent machines.

I have the good fortune to be in possession of his `double-home` box, which he took on every trip he lodged away from home on, and he gave it to me after he had retired from the railway. I often wonder just how many of the wonderful Stanier Pacifics it has been on, if only it could talk! There is a slight dent in it – Tom told me it was caused by him dropping it off the footplate of 46229 `Duchess of Hamilton` (an ex. Edge Hill locomotive) when he and his driver took 46229 back to Camden Shed, from Euston, after working the up `Red Rose Express` from Lime Street. Tom's management style at Mollington Street was of the direct, no-nonsense type and you always knew just where you stood with him. I liked that style because what you saw with him is exactly what you got, he was a first class railwayman who was always firm but also very fair.

George Siddorns was another good railwayman who loved ballroom dancing. George was a Birkenhead man through and through, starting his career on the GWR at Birkenhead and finishing it under BR, also at Birkenhead. His nickname was the `Road Runner` because he could never sit still, he was always on the go. I've seen George dash around outside the shed at Mollington Street with his ever-faithful clipboard, even though there was nothing at all on the shed, the shed was totally empty and even the breakdown vans had gone off to deal with a derailment at Birkenhead Docks. I was convinced that George would pass his shadow one day at Mollington Street, he never just walked, he always moved around at a brisk pace. He was a very good TCI – if a driver asked him if he could go home from duty early, the response from George was always the same `did you book on duty before me?` If the answer from the driver was `no` then George's response was `you can go home when I've gone! I well remember when I was on duty as the 1500-2300 shed driver, or Bank Head driver as it was called, at Mollington Street one Saturday afternoon and he rang me at home to say don't come in until 1800. `Watch the football`, he told me. I did this and when I arrived at Mollington Street at 1800 there was George dressed up in his best ballroom dancing suit, ready to go ballroom dancing! `You are in charge of the shed, Dennis, I'm off to do some `jigging` at the ballroom in Bebington. Frank will help you out, he knows what it is all about`. With that, George disappeared through the office door to do some `Jigging` at the Golden Primrose ballrooms in Bebington.

Frank Bunting, whom George referred to, was a lovely man to work with, as I found out when I myself became a Deputy TCI at Mollington Street. The first thing he told me when I

was standing in for George on that Saturday (I was only a driver, it must be appreciated, so I did not have much of an idea about TCI duties, if any!) was that if anyone rang to speak to George, such as a duty Controller at Lime Street or the Signaller at Green Lane Junction, then tell them he's at the top of the shed 'feeding the fox!'. I did this at about 2100, when the Power Controller Jim Holt rang from Rail House, to confirm the locomotive allocation for the Saturday and Sunday Mollington Street ballast/freight turns. It was not a good start. When I told Jim that he was at the top of the shed 'feeding the fox' I was unaware that Frank had told him the same thing earlier at about 1930. Jim's reply to me was 'that must be the fattest fox in Birkenhead, you'll be telling me it's about to be launched into the Mersey at Cammel Laird's next!'. He knew what was going on with George and when I was a regular Deputy TCI at Mollington Street he used to refer to George as 'Victor' after Victor Sylvester, who was well known in the 1960s as a ballroom dancer and musician. Frank Bunting was a treat to work with because he knew everyone at Birkenhead and he also knew the best and worst of the men there. More importantly, he could predict who was going to ring in 'sick' after a bout of beer drinking on a Saturday night prior to booking on duty for an early Sunday morning turn thus giving me plenty of time to cover the job. Frank was an amazing character and he was respected by all who knew him because of his help...and joviality!

There was always a tea pot filled in the office at Mollington Street, it was a large brown enamel pot which would hold about a gallon of water, enough for about 20 cups of tea. When the pot was empty, Frank's musical skills would come to the fore with a bit of prompting from me. He would pick up this rather large tea pot, clasp both hands around the spout, and then blow down it to make the lid rise and emit different sounds as it quivered on top of the tea pot, the lid never fell off, that was the remarkable thing! His best piece playing the tea pot was 'Onward Christian Soldiers' I'd sing it whilst he played the tea pot, the laughs that we had I shall never forget.

Alec Allen, as a TCI, was never the most popular of individuals because it was not in his nature to be popular. He had a job to do and did it very well. Alec's nickname was 'Laughing Boy' because that is just what he did not do! He was a very serious individual and was never a driver or fireman. Not that this was a qualification for the role of TCI but it certainly made life much easier if you were a driver or fireman at one time. Alec originally came from Barrow and was seconded in the early 1970s to become part of a railway wide team to introduce the TOPS system on the BR network, which is still in use to this very day. It was thanks to this move involving Alec that I was given plenty of experience working in the office at Mollington Street as a Deputy TCI. I always found him to be a fair enough chap in my dealings with him as a driver. Alec lived for many years in the Station House at Hunt's Cross in Liverpool.

The last, but by no means least, of the TCIs at Mollington Street was Alec 'Angus' McDonald, a truly remarkable character, who was known to all. I shall call him Angus, even though his name was Alec, as it was by this name he was universally known. He started his railway career at Bank Hall MPD in Liverpool, on the L&YR, as a fitter's mate and worked his way up to eventually become Depot Shedmaster at Southport, Oldham, Speke Junction and Bangor. Angus was a steam man 'par excellence'! I remained friends with him for over 40 years and he was a true railwayman, relic collector and model railway enthusiast who had a remarkable collection of 'live' steam locomotives and just about everything else. When he was Depot Shedmaster at Bangor he would often have a trip out with Bangor men on the North Wales coast line and have a drive himself. He also did this when he was Foreman Fitter at Bank Hall, he would often have a trip out with Bank Hall men to Carlisle on a Liverpool Exchange to Glasgow service, arranging a 'test' run so he

could have a drive over Shap Summit! It usually involved one of his favourite Bank Hall Class 5XP `Jubilee` locomotives No.45698 `Mars` or No. 45627 `Sierra Leone`. At Mollington Street, Angus was quite eccentric in his ways but he was a thoroughly decent man. If he rang to ask you to book on earlier, or later, as the case may be, he always started the conversation with the word `Greetings`, if he wanted something. That became his universal `catchphrase`. He had the chimney of an ex. LMS Class 4F locomotive in his front garden, with a small tree growing out of it. Angus was among a group of eight who became the first to purchase a withdrawn steam locomotive from Barry Scrapyard in 1968 for £2000 – Class 4F No.43924. He was the only TCI at Mollington Street to have First Class free travel facilities, gained from his previous status as a Depot Shedmaster. Angus was well known as an organiser of the Woodvale Rally for many years, near his home at Ainsdale, something which he enjoyed immensely. He was the last Depot Shedmaster at what he called his `local` depot in Southport, which he was always very proud of. He was a true railwayman.

To conclude Part 2 of this article about Mollington Street and some of its men, I must make mention of another remarkable character. His name is Jan Quartermaine, late of Ainsdale. Jan passed away in October 2015 so it is very appropriate to mention him in this article. Jan was a driver in the Extra Link at Mollington Street, as I was, apart from when I spent about two years in the depot DMU (Diesel Multiple Unit) Link. However, we were as different as `chalk and cheese` when it came to working through the link, remember that in the Extra Link as I pointed out in Part 1, all drivers were marked to `spare` turns such as 1830 Special, 1900 Special and 1930 Special, for example. I worked through the Extra Link, week by week, by doing whatever job was required at the time I was to book on duty. As a driver, it was possible to swap turns with another driver and I did this, when necessary. Jan, on the other hand, would regularly swap for night turns because it suited his lifestyle and, more importantly, working nights between 2200 and 0600 was paid at an enhanced rate of pay. In other words, he made no secret of the fact that he wanted the extra money and swapped turns on a regular basis to achieve it. However, he lived in Ainsdale and did not drive a car. How did he travel to work when he was on nights, or early morning turns such as 0100, for example? Jan didn't like spending money if he didn't have to, he enjoyed earning it but not spending it. If he could save a penny he certainly would, believe me! He had a bicycle, which made a `Penny Farthing` look modern by comparison, and he would ride this from Ainsdale to Liverpool, when no trains were running, which is a considerable distance of some 20 miles. He would then ride his `boneshaker` of a bike, because that's what it really was, through the Queensway Mersey Tunnel to Birkenhead and then book on duty at the appointed time. Jan was a gentle giant, and as strong as the proverbial Ox. The Mersey Tunnel Police would turn a `blind eye` to this as normally it is not allowed to cycle through either of the Queensway or Kingsway Mersey Tunnels. The Toll Booth operators on the Birkenhead side would just waive him through. They probably thought he was an unemployed vagrant, because he could have been mistaken for one! One of the funniest things which happened to him occurred on the special cycle path adjacent to the main Liverpool to Southport Road, near Ainsdale, in the early hours of one morning as he was cycling home. Jan had been on duty 12 hours previously and he was rather tired and whilst riding along the cycle path near his home he fell asleep and went straight into an adjacent hedge, head first! That soon woke him up but he found he couldn't get himself out of the hedge. Jan was about 6ft 2ins tall and he weighed about 15 stones so his problem can be appreciated. He was stuck fast, head first in the bushes, with his size 12 boots sticking out, and wriggling! Imagine what a sight that must have been to a passer-by. Luckily for Jan he hadn't been stuck in the bushes for too long when a police car went past and the police officer driving the vehicle saw him and stopped to help. There

were two policemen in the police car and it took them both about 10 minutes to pull Jan out from the bushes, both of them were falling about laughing as they helped him out! When he was freed from his predicament, he explained to them what had actually happened. I suspect that both of them dined out on that story for a long time afterwards. I very much doubt if they believed that he had actually ridden his bike from Birkenhead to Ainsdale via Liverpool. One of the police officers examined his bicycle and found it had only one brake shoe on it, on the front wheel. Jan was told by one of the police officers, jokingly, that if there was an `MOT` issued for a bicycle then he would get 6 months in prison for riding a piece of scrap iron!

There will be a few more stories about Jan Quartermaine in Part 3 of these articles, starting with the time he rode his bike from Ainsdale to Halton Tunnel, between Frodsham and Warrington, only to be told that the job he was going to do was cancelled, and to make his way back home again, a round trip of some 60 miles!

To be continued...

Gone but not forgotten.



The sad site of the now demolished station building at Lostock Gralam seen here on the 19th January 2006. (Photo: Mike Lenz)

Travelling to 8E: A Continuing Journey. Alan Ashurst

Growing up with an interest in railways in the Warrington area there was much to exercise the mind on the motive power scene in the late 1950s and early 1960s with major routes north, east, south and west to observe and a broad range of locomotives to witness, both from local depots at Dallam and Arpley and coming into the area from further afield. It was then well into the latter decade before excursions further afield began to arouse much personal interest, with outings planned to the bigger cities of Manchester and Liverpool as well as major railway junctions such as Crewe and Chester. Northwich then was not a high priority, being a fairly small depot with a limited allocation comprising little more than Stanier 8F's by this time and, although only just ten miles away by road, by some margin not the easiest place to reach by rail, there being no family car available then. It was thus only towards the end of steam that the special magic of the place became apparent, with the odd cycle ride out through the North Cheshire fields and farms. The final replacement of steam by diesel and electric traction was though close at hand and, when the dreaded month of August 1968 eventually broke, I thought (as no doubt we all did at the time) that might well be that for steam movements in the Northwest. A growing interest in Western Region Diesel Hydraulic types had begun to captivate the mind though from the mid 1960s, with they themselves seemingly on borrowed time too and my attention thus turned south west. Following a few years of significant ill health at the turn of the decade this was to be a theme I was to return to as the early and middle years of the 1970s advanced, but the elimination of these types from the national network in February 1977 was to leave another huge gap in my railway interests.



Class 52 number 1010 Western Campaigner seen at Reading on the 20th February 1977 with the 'Western Requiem' railtour. (Photo: Ray Towell Collection)

I was however now in railway employment, so the accent was more on developing a professional rather than a hobby approach to railways, which was enlivened immensely by the 'Rocket 150' events of 1980. After an initial 'apprenticeship' at Warrington Central Booking Office (I will forever regard myself as a Cheshire Lines man) I was by that time quite happily settled in at the Travel Centre at Bank Quay, that 'other place across the town' which the old CLC hands regarded with some disdain it has to be admitted.



Warrington Central station. (Photo: Wikipedia)

In those far off days of less structured roles it was quite acceptable to produce advertising/publicity of one's own and agreement was granted to display my personal photographic material as a means of encouragement to the travelling public, who were of course still rightly regarded as 'passengers' rather than 'customers' of the railway. My interests in this context bore more fruit when, perhaps in part due to this, I was invited to participate in the Rainhill/Bold Colliery celebrations in the summer of 1980 at which a wonderful time was enjoyed with stewarding at the Trials Re-enactments, where I could not believe my good fortune in getting paid to immerse myself in motive power old and new for a few glorious days. I really could sense the value of identification with the 'railway family' strengthened by my own actual family ties through my grandfather who was a Dallam driver and further relatives from his generation in the Manchester area.

Northwich shed was of course to play a major role in the lead up to Rocket 150 and we had become aware of this at WBQ when the movements of the locos which were to attend the event were made clear in Traffic Notices and suchlike. The plan to hold an 'Open Day' at the shed prior to the main events seemed a great idea with a number of locos breaking their journeys there and so with Mike Southworth and Phil Creaghan I drove over to Northwich on Sunday 18th May 1980 to get a first glimpse of the revival of steam at 8E. What a brilliant day it was to be too, the years rolled away and, even amongst the crowds of visitors, it was possible to sense what we had lost twelve years earlier as the fires were being dropped for what we felt would be the final time at Lostock Hall, Rose Grove and Carnforth.

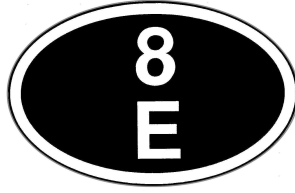


Merchant Navy Class Pacific locomotive number 35028 'Clan Line' seen arriving back at Northwich with the shuttle operation at the 1980 Open Day. (Photo: Mike Lenz)

Thus, Northwich had made a firm statement of intent to be part of whatever plans might be put in place following Rocket 150, initially with the 'Steam 150' Manchester Victoria to Liverpool services later that year, with Jubilee 4-6-0 5690 'Leander' an almost semi-permanent resident at 8E for the rest of that summer (the 'Jubs' were always a personal favourite of mine, with a good few based at Dallam in former years) and the promotion of further individual tours routed via the Mid Cheshire line. My personal involvement with this though could not have been envisaged at this stage and, were it not for a chance remark made by a friend in Warrington Bank Quay travel centre one day, it might indeed never have happened at all! The story of that encounter and what it was to lead onto is though for next time.



PHOTO PUZZLE: The locomotive is seen in the down platform at St. Earth, Cornwall with the driver awaiting the all clear from the guard. Note the siding on the up line uses for storage of restaurant cars in the summer months during the 1950s and 60s.



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 25 #25058 stands outside the shed awaiting its next duty in the early 1980s. (Photo: Mark Roughsedge)]

This journal is published by the
8E Railway Association



Printed by Johnsons Printers
Oat Market, Nantwich, Cheshire, CW5 5AP
01270 625207