

Historical Snippets

These were a number of very short pieces that appeared in the Society's newsletter below this heading over a number of years. Both the subjects and sources (where quoted) are very varied, so they are simply grouped here and presented in date order.

BRS Newsletter May/June 1963

Indicative thoughts

How is the railway track maintained true and level? We have all seen gangers busy shovelling ballast, but how do they know where to put it? Is the track too high or too low, or does it sink under the weight of a train and spring back to an apparently safe level after it has passed? At a firm I visited a short while ago I found part of the answer to these problems, as they manufacture track maintenance equipment one item of which is a track indicator.

This consists of a steel spike about two feet long to which is welded a steel plate about 10" square having near the centre a pivot stud. Upon the stud is mounted a bell crank with about 4:1 arm ratio, and on the same stud is a short arm pointed at the end, and with a down turned lug that touches the side of the short arm of the bell crank. A scale is engraved on the plate so that it is traversed by the short arm, and free movement by either arm is prevented by spring washers and nut on the stud.

The method of operating this equipment is to drive the spike into the ground about 18" from the track and adjust the long arm of the bell crank, so that it is touching the underside of the rail. Then turn the short indicating arm so that the lug is touching the side of the short arm of the crank, and note the reading on the scale. The instruments would be fitted every 10 yards or so over say ¼ mile of track. The ganger then waits for a train to pass when any depression of the track will press the long arm of the crank down, and move the short arm of the crank which must move the pointer arm. When the track springs back, the crank arm which is lightly spring-loaded returns to its original position, but the pointer arm remains at the point to which it was moved by the crank, thus indicating the track movement.

Shovels, spades and man-power do the rest, but this rather crude indicator shows where it must be done.

By Cadbury

BRS Newsletter February 1980

Prototype for Everything Department

In 1908 LB&SCR '12' 4-4-2 No. 16 performed the near impossible (but not unique – see below) feat of derailling at 50mph, when running bunker first between Hever and Edenbridge, and rerailling at speed 1¹/₄ miles further on. The train was little damaged, but some track was.

Mick Hutson, from 'RCTS Publications' "Locomotives of the LBSCR, part 3"

In 1935 R.E.L. Maunsell proposed buying ten Beyer-Garrett 4-6-2+2-6-4 locos with 6'3" coupled wheels, 6 cylinders, a length of 100' and a working weight of 209¹/₂ tons. They were to work very heavy goods and express passenger trains between Basingstoke and Exeter, and, by concentrating traffic into fewer, heavier, trains, some 77 other locos could be replaced. These massive engines

were never built, although Beyer-Peacock supplied quotations and much discussion took place – A Great Pity!

Mick Hutson, from 'RCTS Publications' "Locomotives of the Southern Railway, part 1"

In the early 1960's, probably 1964 – I forget the exact date – a Craven 2-car DMU emulated Mick's I2 in Molewood Tunnel, just north of Hertford North en route to Stevenage. Twas early one Monday morning, with thick snow and no trains over the section since Saturday afternoon, and ice had built up above rail level in the tunnel. The DMU climbed off the rails and cut a track in the ice, dropping back onto the rails with a crash as it left the tunnel.

Bill Foote (newsletter editor)

At least one SR 'River' class loco was also reported to have achieved this feat before the disastrous derailment at Sevenoaks in 1927. Although the engine re-railed itself, the marks were visible on the track.

Ken Ricketts (webmaster)

BRS Newsletter 13 December 1985

Why Accountancy is not Boring

In 1862 the West Coast railway Companies (London & North Western, Caledonian, Scottish Central, and Scottish North Eastern Railways) decided to set up a stock of jointly owned carriages for the Anglo-Scottish trains (the "West Coast Joint Stock").

Forty new L&NWR carriages were transferred in 1863 and were valued at a total of £13374-18-0d. It was necessary to determine how much each Company should pay of this charge, and for future repairs and renewals. After long and complicated discussions and calculations the following was agreed.

The total sum was divided into 17643 parts and the "attributable charge" which formed the numerator of this fraction was calculated as 11196 for the L&NWR, 1261 for the SCR, 536 for the SCR and 4560 for the CR. This was officially stated to be "for the sake of simplifying (sic) the accounts in connection with the repairs and earnings of the stock". After the CR absorbed the other Scottish railways its share rose to 6447/17643ths, or 36.54%.

Remember these sums were worked out without pocket calculators and the clerks only had log tables and slide rules. Why they found it necessary to do this is something only accountants can answer!

From "West Coast Joint Stock" (R M Casserley & P A Millard; HMRS)

NB The original article states "1261 for the SCR, 536 for the SCR"; I am pretty sure that one of the 'SCR' should be 'SNER', but not which. Ken Ricketts

BRS Newsletter 19 February 1988

The disgraceful practice of making drawings and writings on the walls of Water Closets and other places must be prevented. The Station Masters are particularly requested to inspect, at least once a day, all such places, and to cause the Closets and Urinals to be in a clean and tidy condition.

From the L&SWR Service Timetables, August 1857

On 26th March 1857 an anonymous passenger sent the L&SWR board ten shillings (50p) for “having misused one of the Company’s carriages in a case of urgency”.

BRS Newsletter 15 April 1988

On 10th February 1859 the L&SWR Traffic Committee considered the provision of ladders to the high signals at crossing gates on the Dorchester line. It was recommended “these be placed where required owing to gatekeepers being old or lame men”. Life must have been hard previously!

Between January and April 1868 the Night Watchmen at Nine Elms goods depot were armed with revolvers “to be strictly cautioned to use them with proper discretion”. This was due to the Fenian troubles, but no incidents occurred.

BRS Newsletter 17 June 1988

In November 1982 the Chief Clerk at Salisbury Milford goods station was severely reprimanded and fined £5 for using a porter “nearly entirely for his own private household purposes”.

LSWR Board Minutes.

June 1868: An engineman has been rewarded for his presence of mind in regaining his engine after accidentally falling from it.”

LSWR Board Minutes.

BRS Newsletter 12 August 1988

In 1852 the L&SWR set up a fund for their retired clerical staff. It was named “The Decayed South Western Clerk’s Fund”!

“The Station Master (at Twickenham) to be directed to keep his fowls on his own ground and his son’s goat not be allowed to be kept at the station.”

LSWR Traffic Committee Minutes April 1868

BRS Newsletter 14 October 1988

At the August 31st, 1858 meeting of Exeter & Exmouth Railway shareholders a broad gauge supporter, Mr Wreford, threatened to horsewhip the chairman for not allowing him to speak. The chairman then called him a “confounded black-guard”.

During the Edwardian era the LSWR noted with concern the number of motor cars to be seen at Ascot and other race courses, which was reducing 1st class rail traffic: in August 1906 the Chairman, Sir Charles Scotter, considered that business would recover “when people tired of motor cars”.

BRS Newsletter 9 December 1988

In the early days of railways, many inventors offered strange ideas to railway Companies. Two ideas offered to the L&SWR were:-

“Insert feather beds between the carriages in lieu of buffers, and to suspend a bed of extra proportions in front and at the tail of each train.”

“the engine ought always to be a mile to a mile and a half in advance of the train, connected to it by a sufficiently strong rope, in case of an accident the engineer only would be imperilled.”

Strangely, neither scheme was adopted.

BRS Newsletter 10 February 1989

In January 1899 Exmouth residents sent a letter to the L&SW board complaining tht the 2nd and 3rd class carriages on the branch were “not only comfortless, but for the most part repulsively dirty”.

”A guard has been rewarded for praiseworthy conduct in holding the cross rod of his break which was broken in travelling”

August 1867 LSW working timetable

BRS Newsletter 14 April 1989

In 1840, Cornelius Stovin, the LSW Traffic Manager at Nine Elms agreed to pay £10 compensation to a passenger whose parrot had been killed in transit. He did however insist on the stuffed dead parrot being handed over to the company. (Was this the origin of the Monty Python “dead parrot” sketch?)

BRS Newsletter 9 June 1989

In 1893 the LB&SCR introduced steam heating on a few Brighton expresses (prior to this passengers had to hire footwarmers). The Vicar of Benwick near Eastbourne wrote a long letter to the Brighton chairman complaining that the introduction of luxurious travelling was ungodly and could only lead to civil disturbances when sampled by the lower orders of society.

Just to show that the L&SWR was not the only railway on which silly things happened.....

During the 1860’s there was a driver called Ted Harrison at Strood on the South Eastern Railway. He was something of an artist and, like many drivers of the period, adorned his engine, 0-6-0 No 65, with stars and extra lining. Officialdom did not object to this, but Harrison decided to take his artistic talents further and painted several scantily clad ladies on the cab weatherboards. They were much admired by other local footplate crews, and apparently the public did not complain, but the Strood Stationmaster did, and sent a report to HQ at London Bridge. Harrison was ordered to remove the paintings, which he did under protest.

The Stationmaster, as part of his duties, had to inspect the station lavatories at dawn to ensure that no graffiti was present to upset passengers. Harrison & other drivers decided to make this task worthwhile and one evening painted a large devil chasing a nude lady across the whitewashed walls. The Stationmaster when carrying out his inspection the next morning was not amused and called the police. Harrison was proved the culprit and ordered to whitewash the walls in his own time, also being fined 2 days pay! (Locos of the SER – D. Bradley)

It was reported that a stag had jumped through a window of the Royal waiting room at Windsor station, and that the carpet had been damaged by bloodstains. (nothing about what happened to the stag!)

LSW Loco and Carriage Committee minutes February 1888

BRS Newsletter 13 October 1989

In the LSWR 1914 Passenger timetable were listed the charges for conveying “sundry exceptional articles” by passenger train. These included:

Corking Machines (Patent)

Automatic Penny-in-the-Slot Pianos

Edisons Kinetoscopes

Harps weighing over 1cwt

Automatic Lung Testing Machines

Scissor Grinders Machines

Edwardian railway booking clerks had to be constantly on their guard for passengers arriving with one of these things, and be aware of the correct charges to be applied. Volunteers are sought to turn up at Bracknell station today with one of these and try to persuade BR to let you take it with you in the guards van!

December 1869: two porters used doghooks to load a pianoforte. *LSW Fines Records, working timetable 1869*

BRS Newsletter 8 December 1989

BR’s “on time or within 10 minutes of time” idea is not a new way to improve punctuality records. An L&SWR investigation in May 1841 stated, out of 532 trains:

Before time474

10 to 20 mins late.....32

20 to 30 mins late.....17

Over 30 mins late.....9

BRS Newsletter 13 April 1990

In 1836 an Act was passed to build a harbour at Sidmouth in East Devon, with a railway 1.5 miles long to bring stone along the coast for use on the jetties. This ran along the esplanade and through a tunnel ½ mile long under Salcombe Hill (one portal still remains).

A local blacksmith was commissioned to build a man powered wagon to carry stone blocks, but this proved a failure. A steam locomotive was ordered instead and was delivered by sea, the ship running onto the beach to unload. It was then realised that no crane existed to offload it, so the ship was

floated off and sent round to Exmouth Quay. The engine was then pulled over the hills to Sidmouth by teams of horses and put onto the rails. It was run along the line to the mouth of the tunnel and it was then found it was too large to go through. For a short period it was coupled to wagons and used to give pleasure trips along the esplanade. By 1838 it was sold and the line dismantled, never used for the planned purpose. The tunnel was blocked up to stop smugglers using it to store brandy.

A foundation stone was laid for the harbour in 1837 but as no stone could be brought to the site, nothing else was ever done.

BRS Newsletter 22 June 1990

“A shunter has been fined for throwing an engine off the rails”.

LSWR June 1883 working timetable

BRS Newsletter 10 August 1990

In May 1890 the driver of ‘Brighton’ Stroudley 2-4-0 no.206 arrived at Brighton station with an early train. He held a grudge against the station master and saw several crates of chickens stacked on the platform. He took one and released them into the first class waiting room, then ran back to his engine. Unfortunately, he slipped and broke his collar bone, so when a passenger complained about having an overcrowded waiting room, he was found to be the culprit.

D Bradley, Locos of the LB&SCR

BRS Newsletter 5 October 1990

Prototype for everything; there is a record of a S&DJR driver taking a goat home to keep for milking, riding on the footplate, on a 4F 0-6-0 from Templecombe in the 1950s.

BRS Newsletter 12 April 1991

In 1862 a Great Northern Railway goods train stopped at Bottesford near Nottingham for water, which was taken from a nearby private stream. When this had finished the driver discovered a large trout swimming around in the tender tank, which later formed the driver’s family’s evening meal. Unfortunately, authority found out and the driver was reprimanded for fishing without a licence!

BRS Newsletter 11 October 1991

In January 1899 a GWR 46ft 6in carriage was being propelled into a platform at Crewe station LNWR, to be attached to a train, when one of its protruding guard’s lookouts struck a column of the long footbridge linking the station to the locomotive works. In all, 105ft of the bridge collapsed but luckily no-one was hurt. It was found that the lookout exceeded the loading gauge by over an inch, & the LNWR asked the GWR not to send this type of carriage to Crewe again.

West Coast Joint Stock by R Casserley & P Millard

BRS Newsletter 6 December 1991

The GWR is usually regarded as an efficient and sensible railway, but.....

In 1881 the GWR was opposing the proposed railway from Swindon to Cheltenham and at the Parliamentary enquiry produced a massive plan of the new line and their existing route to Southampton via Basingstoke, designed to show how superior their gradients were.

Unfortunately the engineer of the SCER noticed that the gradients were all wrong and left Southampton Docks 243ft in the air; partly due to this the GW lost.

In 1850 Joseph Beattie of the L&SWR faced intensive questioning from the Locomotive Committee about his planned use of tank engines. The matter was resolved when it came to light that one of his leading critics thought a tank engine was an engine which ran propelling its tender.

On 7th august 1886 a horse bolted into the waiting room at Cannon Street Station, injuring two or three people.

SER A Gray

BRS Newsletter 10 April 1992

It is difficult today to appreciate fully the demands made on early 19th Century Locomotive Superintendents by their Company Directors, who frequently questioned them on important technical matters or displayed their in-depth knowledge of steam locomotive design.

In November 1865 William Martley of the LC&DR had to attend to the following entry in the Board's minute book: "MARTLEY's attention is drawn to the stuffing of the cushion of one compartment of the first class carriage No. 100B, which Lord Harris found quite hard at the edge.

In 1850 the Great Northern Railway was concerned by competition from river steamers between Boston and Lincoln and it decided to convert six cattle trucks to open 'carriages' to carry passengers at a halfpenny per mile on the slowest trains. They were called 'fourth class' and it took eleven years to break the water competition because apparently most passengers returned to the river boats after sampling this form of rail travel!

MR Carriages Vol 1 by G Dow

Early Post Office carriages were often fairly primitive as the GPO were reluctant to pay for unnecessary frills and features not strictly connected for handling the mail. The early 1840's vehicles on the Midland Railway only had doors on one side, to save money, and this caused problems when platforms were encountered on the opposite side to the door. In 1866 the staff of the Newcastle-Derby day mail complained that they could not unload mailbags at some NER stations by passing them through a window, and that staff could only leave the carriage at Newcastle by climbing out of the door on the trackside, a practice that was not only very dangerous but also contrary to railway regulations. This latter point was considered the most important by the MR who decided to build two new vehicles for this train.

MR Carriages Vol 1 by G Dow

Those modellers who tend to practice heavy shunts when operating model layouts can take heart from a series of collisions on the South Eastern Railway in 1898. On 8th April an Up excursion arrived at Ashford station behind 4-4-0, was short of steam. A new engine was requested from the nearby shed and No. 250, another 'F' class 4-4-0 was sent to the rescue. To reach the head of the excursion it had to run up to the rear of the train to reverse over a crossover onto the centre through road, and the signalman forgot to tell the driver how close the train was to the crossover point. As a result No. 250 ran into the last carriage and had to be returned to the shed. Another engine, 2-4-0 No. 246 was obtained but this merely repeated the same operation and the same collision. So another engine was found, 4-4-0 No. 232 and this did exactly the same! By now the train was rather battered and 27 passengers injured. A relief train and engine had to be provided and this finally reached London three hours late.

Bradley, Locos of the SER

In about 1920 an unusual failure occurred to a signal on the NWR. One of the rods for the signal mechanism broke and it was found that the signal arm fell to 'clear' instead of returning to 'danger' under the influence of the balance weight, as it should have done to 'fail-safe'. The signal arm was sent to Crewe for inspection and it was found that so much lead based paint had been applied to the arm, that it was now heavier than the balance weight and would automatically move to 'clear'!

LNWR Signalling, R D Foster

[BRS Newsletter 14 August 1992](#)

In March 1843 a London & Greenwich Railway porter was fined £2 for singing obscene songs in a Deptford public house.

SER, A Grey

[BRS Newsletter 4 December 1992](#)

At the request of the Earl of Lichfield, several L&NWR signal posts in Shugborough Park (on the WCML near Stafford) were painted green.

LNWR Signalling R D Foster

[BRS Newsletter 29 July 1993](#)

On the Wanlockhead branch of the Caledonian Railway in Southern Scotland, special arrangements were made in case the branch train should break down and they needed to get the train staff for the single line back to the main line junction. A horse was kept at a farm near the terminus of the line, and, when necessary, the train guard was required to go to the farm and ride to the junction at Elvanfoot carrying the staff. This lasted until LMS days when it was arranged that a phone call could be made to advise that the line was clear.

[BRS Newsletter 17 May 1994](#)

The Stonehouse and Nailsworth Railway near Gloucester opened in 1867 but no station was opened at Woodchester, one of the villages en route, until the Midland Railway took over in 1868. This was

because some of the shareholders of the S&N feared that having a station there would encourage the use of a nearby Catholic Convent.

BRS Newsletter 28 July 1995

On the 16th October 1895 the Engineering Committee considered a letter from Lord Downshire's Agent, for Lord Downshire and two of his 'underkeepers' to have permission to walk and shoot on the railway between Bracknell station and Star Lane Crossing. This was refused, but Lord Downshire could have a walking permit similar to that already held by his 'headkeeper'.

Taken from the Minutes of LSWR Engineering Committee, held at the Public Record Office Kew

BRS Newsletter 6 October 1995

A Snippet from the L&SWR Timetable for November 1859:

1 1st class single fare from Bracknell to Waterloo was 5/6d (27p). The return fare was 8/6d (42p). The 2nd class single was 3/9d (18p) and the return 6/0d (30p). Third class singles were 2/6d (12p) and there was no 3rd class return available; no network cards either! An annual 3rd class season ticket cost £30.

To get a season ticket you had to apply in person to the L&SWR Treasurer at Waterloo at specified times; one assumes that season ticket holders were still few in number!

On 14th November 1894 the LSWR Engineering Committee read a letter from Colonel Pel (John Peel??!!!), suggesting that new gates and locks were required for the 'Hunting Gates' on the line near Wokingham. The gates were to be repaired at the expense of the Hunt Committee. I do not know where these were. On an old 1883 OS map, there was a footpath crossing the line midway between Star Lane and Waterloo crossings, which has not been there for many years; this may have been a private crossing used by the Hunt only, the only case of such a crossing that I have heard of on the LSWR.

BRS Newsletter 9 February 1996

17th March 1910; Request from Mr Headington, Master of the Berks & Bucks Staghounds, want duplicates of the keys to the gates at Longshot Lane Occupation Crossing, so the hounds can cross the line. Allowed for one year. (Longshot Crossing was on a lane behind the present site of Bracknell refuse dump; the crossing was closed when the Berkshire Way was opened).

LSWR Engineering Committee, PRO Ref. RAIL411/60

BRS Newsletter 22 March 1996

In June 1873 a Mr Turner approached the LSWR Traffic Committee offering to run a one-horse omnibus linking Bracknell Station to Wellington College, Crowthorne. It was decided to accept this, as Turner would run the service at his own risk if the LSWR would 'find the coach' – doubtless they

had a suitable vehicle. No further record of such a service exists, so I do not know if this early ancestor of the Beehive 194 ever operated!

BRS Newsletter 9 August 1996

Prototype for everything department:- William Stroudley's 'C' class 0-6-0's of 1873/4 had poor boiler circulation and steam pressure rose quickly when the engine was not working. Crews feared an explosion and so it was common to see the engine uncoupled from its wagons and running to and fro between the train and the signals, using up surplus steam.

BRS Newsletter 4 October 1996

The South Eastern Railway had a poor reputation for its passenger services. There was a problem in the 1850s with the passengers taking lighted candles into carriages; there were no lamps in the 3rd class. In 1852 an SER director suggested that 3rd class carriages should have their roofs removed. At the same time there was an SER shareholder called Allmann, who insisted on sending his pet 'fancy pig' by passenger train!

SER, A Gray

In 1922 SECR 'B1' 4-4-0 no 441 was disabled near Tonbridge by a cock pheasant. The large bird hit the safety valves and so damaged them that they released all of the boilers' contents immediately.

Locos of the SER, D Bradley

6 September 1870; 'Read letter from Mr Rogers, clerk to the Local Board of Health at Reading, stating that complaints are made of the smoke from the Company's engines at the station, and calling on the Company to abate the nuisance'. Beattie, the Loco Superintendent, was told to 'see to this'.

On 22 September Beattie reported that LSWR engines were not causing the problem, so Mr Rogers was referred to the South Eastern Railway.

21 March 1872; Mr Rogers wrote again, complaining about the smoke nuisance; this time he was to be asked to note the time, and the name and number of the engines concerned so that the culprits could be traced. There is no further record that Mr Roger indulged in any train spotting!

Minutes of LSWR Traffic & Locomotive Comm, PRO Ref. RAIL411/182

BRS Newsletter 4 April 1997

On 4th Feb 1904 LSWR Adams 0-6-0 No. 497 broke its crank axle at Ascot while working the 8:10pm Reading-Woking goods. The engine and 13 wagons with the brake van were derailed. Both lines were blocked for several hours and damage was estimated at £40. The axle had broken due to a derailment at Guildford 3 days earlier, leaving a 'latent flaw'.

16th April 1902. Three old carriage bodies were sold to Wokingham Borough Surveyor. Two were sold to Easthampstead Rural District Council.

August 1866. A Mr. Wood asks that patients travelling to and from a cholera convalescent hospital at Bracknell be conveyed free of charge or at reduced rates. This was declined.

LSWR Locomotive Committee minutes

On the 20th December 1915 the 3pm Sunningdale-Ascot goods arrived at Ascot Gas Works siding. The guard failed to secure the brake on his 10 ton van properly, and it was left unattended on the main line, attached to a single wagon. Another wagon was loose shunted onto them, and all three ran away down the 1:296 gradient towards Sunningdale on the wrong (Down) line. They broke through the crossing gates at Sunningdale and were crossed to the Up line at Virginia Water. Staff at Egham were forewarned, and the 7:25pm Sunningdale-Twickenham goods was started, so it was moving forward when the runaway trucks struck the rear, so that no damage was done. The guard was reduced in grade.

BRS Newsletter 5 September 1997

5th November 1846; the trustees of the Windsor Forest Turnpike Road petitioned the company (Reading, Guildford & Reigate Railway) about their plan to build the new line parallel to the road from Wokingham to Reading. They were concerned that trains would frighten the horses on the road.

BRS Newsletter 19 December 1998

Shunting Horns

With a view to facilitating shunting operations it has been decided to supply shunters with horns, and stationmasters should apply to the storekeeper for the number they require. These horns should be used to control shunting operations and the following code of signals must be strictly adhered to:

Move forwards	One long blast
Move back	Two long blasts
Stop	Three long blasts
Ease couplings	Four short blasts (two, pause, two)

George T White, Superintendent of the Line

LSWR Special Notice 27/7/1897 PRO Kew RAIL411/424

LSWR Traffic Committee 12/5/1886

“Read letter from Mr Cavendish Bentinck complaining of the coffee supplied to him on a recent occasion in the Salisbury station refreshment rooms. Reply to be sent that the matter has been taken up with the refreshment contractor” (RAIL411/255)

LSWR Instruction to Gatekeepers 1849

In signalling trains, Gatekeepers are always to stand outside the gate and on that side of the line nearest to the coming train and when the gate is situated on a curve they are always to stand on the outside of the same. Also, in giving the "All Right" signal they are to extend their arm at right angle in the direction of the train, instead of parallel as before.

BRS Newsletter 19 March 1999

In February 1878 a Colonel Burnaby of the War Department asked the LSWR/LBSCR Joint Committee (which ran the railways in Portsmouth) as to the cost of an 'iron musket proof gallery' on the roof of the Ordnance Row signal box. The WD was to pay. In April the gallery was costed at £370 and was apparently built. It was intended for use if the French invaded Portsmouth, and not to defend railway staff from irate passengers!

BRS Newsletter 8 October 2004

It is with sadness that we have to record the passing of Mick Hutson, who although not currently a member, had been for over 30 years. He was at one time a regular contributor to this newsletter, particularly on matters of railway history.
