

Left Hand Running

The September 2007 Newsletter of The British Train Society
Illinois

A View From The Footplate

The dog days of summer are rapidly coming to a close and we will soon be into our busier fall/winter period. Nevertheless, 12 of our fraternity met in John Derler's basement on Saturday August 18th and we had a good opportunity to lay out our program for the next quarter and enjoy a presentation by Martin Venn on railway signals and three accidents that happened as a consequence of faulty implementation of procedures. Thank you Martin for your effort and it certainly generated a lot of interest.

Our next major undertaking as a group will be the participation in the Southland Model Railroad show at Richards High School in Oak Lawn. The dates for the two day show are September 22nd and 23rd. We received official notice that our application was accepted and so we can now proceed to make specific plans. As you will recall, we plan to show the Viaduct and George's mill together with the static model displays as we had at Harper College and Trainfest. Harry has taken on the responsibility for the arrangements and he will be contacting some of you in the next few weeks to pull everything together. It will be an interesting undertaking and perhaps at some point we can think about displaying the full layout. In the meantime I hope you find time to enjoy our hobby in the many ways that present themselves.

Happy Modelling, Don Buchanan



Calendar of Coming Events

September 9th, 9:30 am – 3:00 pm
Great Midwest Train Show
Wheaton

September 15th, 1:30 pm
BTS Regular Meeting
Naperville (Harry Raynis)

September 22nd & 23rd, 10:00 am – 5:00 pm
Southland Model Train Show
Oak Lawn (Richards HS, 10601 S. Central Ave.)

October 14th, 9:30 am – 3:00 pm
Great Midwest Train Show
Wheaton

October 20th, 1:30 pm
BTS Regular Meeting
Clarendon Hills (Don Buchanan)

November 17th, 1:30 pm
BTS Regular Meeting]
Clarendon Hills or Lombard (TBD)



Left Hand Running

The title of our monthly (more-or-less) club newsletter, *Left Hand Running*, refers to the operation of double track railway lines in Great Britain, where trains run on the left hand track. But it is not only Great Britain where trains run to the left. Although road and highway traffic keeps to the right [in theory, at least], the railways of many other countries also run their trains on the left.

It seems to be logical that this would be the case in countries such as Ireland and India, Australia and New Zealand which were parts of the British Empire and where railway development was very much in the hands of British railwaymen. And so is the case.

But trains in France, Switzerland, Belgium, Portugal, Sweden, Italy, Japan, China, parts of Austria, numerous African countries and even some here in metropolitan Chicago also run on the left! Were there British connections in these places, too?

Possibly! In many cases, the railway lines in question were built by British engineers but in other cases there are operational reasons for left hand instead of right hand running.

And while left hand or right hand running generally applies to most railway lines in any given country, there are exceptions.

Here in the Chicago area, both the freight and commuter lines of the former Chicago & Northwestern RR operate on the left. The exact reasons are lost with history but generally it is believed that station layouts of the original Chicago & Galena Union, then a single track line, made left-hand running more desirable when the line was double-tracked. Other legends state that it had more to do with the layout of the original downtown Chicago station and the safety of detraining passengers. Whatever the exact reason, this bit of left hand running persists to this day. So, trainspotters, be careful when trackside in Elmhurst or Des Plaines – trains may sneak up from behind!

But left-handedness was not reserved just for the C&NW - in the early 1900s the

elevated Loop Line (from which downtown



Chicago gets its name) also ran left, as did the Northwestern and the Lake Street Elevated lines!

But not to be outdone, there is a section of the London

Underground where right hand running prevails! It seems that the Central Line crosses over itself between the East Acton and White City stations to become right hand running. The line crosses itself again between White City and Shepherds Bush stations to become left handed once again.

So there!

The Next Meeting

The next regular meeting of the British Train Society will be at Harry Raynis' home in Naperville on September 15th. Harry will present a program titled "Tanks and Toads of the Great Western Railway". Don't miss it!

