

Left Hand Running

The June 2010 Newsletter of The British Train Society

www.britishtrainsociety.org

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A View From The Footplate

Picnic, Picnic, Picnic. Yes it's June again and Ralph and Kathy Transue are hosting our annual picnic. Once again it will be at their lovely home in Lombard. As we did last year, all food and beverages will be provided except, of course, for beer, wine and whiskey. So if you want "A Pint Of The Best", bring it yourself. There will be ice chests to keep your drinks cool. Cost will be between \$8.00 and \$10.00 per person. If you are bringing little kids, let Ralph or Kathy know so that they will have toys out for them to play with.

And of course, we will have a Raffle! Each member can buy a ticket for \$1.00 and every ticket will be a winner. There are some really nice prizes, two locomotives, coaching stock and wagons in OO and N scales, books and more! A good way to spend a dollar.

Shirts are on order for our new members, and I should know soon what the handling charges are this year. We should still be close to the \$24.00 each that we paid last time. So if you need a new shirt or one of a different size, let me know and I will order it for you.

See you at the Picnic! Harry

Calendar of Coming Events

June 6th, 9:30 am – 3:00 pm
Great Midwest Train Show
Wheaton (DuPage County Fairgrounds)

June 19th, 1:30 pm
BTS Annual Summer Picnic
Lombard (Ralph Transue, 82 West Rd.)

July 17th, 1:30 pm
BTS Summer Train Excursion
South Elgin (Fox River Trolley Museum)

August 8th, 9:00 am – 5:00 pm
Great Midwest Train Show
Wheaton (DuPage County Fairgrounds)

September 18th, 1:30 pm
BTS Regular Meeting
Lincolnshire (Mike Perry, 24 Wimbledon Ct)

The Big Bang Theory

By Martin Venn

My first full time job was as a Booking Boy (Signal Lad) with British Railways, Southern Region, Southwestern Division at Feltham Junction. My actual start date was Tuesday April 8th 1958. On the Wednesday before I was a 4th year schoolboy (15 years old): then came the Easter Holidays followed by a new life at the Feltham Junction signal box where I remained until April 1960 when I transferred to Raynes Park. Having been an avid train spotter, it was almost a dream come true. I soon settled in and started shift work, matching the chap I was replacing. The hours were: Monday to Saturday 06:00 – 14:00, then off Sunday. The second week was Monday through Saturday 14:00 – 22:00 and Sunday 06:00 – 14:00. Sunday was a heavy cleaning day: (1) empty chemical toilet and recharge it; (2) scrub the brown linoleum floor and the footboard on hands and knees with buckets of hot water; (3) clean all windows, inside & out. The panes were about 12" x 8". Do you

have any idea of how many panes of glass there are in a signalbox? Lots and Lots and Lots!! You reached the outside windows by sliding a set of windows open and stepping on a 15-inch walkway. This ran along the front of the box and the west side (the box faced south). There was one steel hand railing with vertical supports about every 4 feet with wooden planking to walk on which was safe enough if you took care. When an up train passed, the tops of the roofs were less than two feet away. All the EMUs were doing about 65mph. We had four per hour each way each direction. Saturday mornings were also cleaning days: polish the leaves with metal polish as well as something that looked like chain mail on a leather pad. Then all of the brass instruments, bells, repeaters, and other equipment had to be polished. At the end of each shift I also swept the floor, dusted all of the equipment and phones and, lastly and most important, I had to make sure that the kettle was boiling so that Tea could be made right away. Although I have never served in the military, it seemed that there was a military air about it.

Feltham Junction is on a secondary main line from London Waterloo at about milepost 15. The line continues on to Staines where the Windsor line branches off. The line continues to Reading Southern with branches to Addlestone and Aldershot. Backing up: The first true junction on the Windsor lines is at Barnes, where the Hounslow Loop Line, branches north to Kew Bridge. Here there is a triangular junction with the Midland region, & North London lines. The North London line crosses and/or connects with just about every line leaving London north of the Thames. The loop continues on to Hounslow Station (where I had my last job). About ½ a mile beyond Hounslow Station is a triangular set of junctions. First is Hounslow Junction. The East side of the

triangle goes from Hounslow Junction to Whitton Junction; the West side turns west to Feltham Junction.

The passenger train service consisted ½ hourly service in each direction for two routes. All ran via Twickenham except in the rush hour. The service to Reading Southern and Aldershot ran non-stop to Staines: then all stations to and splitting at Ascot. These were made up of 2 x 2 car EMUs and 4 x 2 car sets in the rush hour. The Windsor and Waybridge trains made all stops from Twickenham and split at Staines. In the rush hour most trains ran as 8 cars and did not split on route. Some were routed to run via the Hounslow loop in the rush hour, to avoid congestion between Twickenham and Barnes. These routes are still very busy today with active service by Southwest Trains. You can trace the routes on Google. Feltham has become important as a close connection to London Heathrow Airport. There was a favorite train of mine: the 16.12 SX Woking to Neasden empty fish vans. It always bypassed the yard to go from Up Main to Up Branch and was hauled by an H15 or S15 class 4-6-0 usually with 50 - 60 vans.

Freight traffic was heavy. There were 8 possible time slots in and out of the yard per hour. Although we never saw that many used 4 each way were not uncommon. All freight went via the loop, except the local to Kingston, Shepperton and Twickenham. I never saw it depart as it left at night but it returned at about 19:20 and was always very heavy and struggled up the bank from Twickenham with as many as 65 wagons. Motive power was always an 0-6-0 of the 0395, 700, C2X, or Q1 class. Southern routes included Hither Green, Nine Elms, Barnes (the loop local), Neasden, Brent, Willesden, and Temple Mills. There were inter-regional freights from the Eastern and Midland regions. There were several freights per day from Brent. These were

anything from a 3F class 0-6-0 to a 9F class 2-10-0 (but no tank engines). 4F 0-6-0s and 8F 2-8-0s were the most common. The Eastern Region had two routes: the first from Harringay (GNR) via the North London Line. These were coal in, empties out. They seem to run irregularly but were always powered by an ex-War Department 2-8-0; the second and more interesting service from was that from Ferme Park (ex GNR) which always had a J50 0-6-0T (which often as not, had only a steam brake). There was one train which arrived just after 06:00 (the 03:50 from Ferme Park). It returned at about 09:40. There were one or more others per day. These trains were always limited to about 30 wagons and had live cattle going back. These went to Maiden Lane for slaughter. The route was very strange and encountered some very steep grades: leaving Ferme Park it headed for Kings Cross, then down to the Widen Lines which paralleled the Underground to Moorgate. The line curved to the south, came up by Holban Viaduct and passed Blackfriars. Then it crossed over the River Thames and on to Loughrough Junction. Then it turned right and on to Brixton and Wandsworth, turned off at Longheadge Junction and dropped down to cross under the Victoria – Brighton main line and also under the main Waterloo line. Bingo! Clapham Junction! From there is down to Barnes around the Hounslow Loop.

The layout at Feltham Junction consisted of Up and Down Main lines and the Junction with the Hounslow Loop Line. There was an exit from the Up Yard to the Up Line and also from the Down Line to the Down Yard which had ten reception roads varying in length from 48 to 73 standard wagon lengths (15 feet) and a Loco Arrival Line and the Loco Exit. There was also the Engine Line which ran from the Down Hump Box parallel to No. 1 Reception Line and was used for any returning incoming

light loco that did not have to go on shed. The only one that used it was the J50 from Ferme Park. It was also used for up freights arriving at the west end of the yard which would continue on as a solid train (i.e. not humped) leaving the east end of the yard. As far as I can recall the only freight we had was the 11:00 Feltham to Nine Elms fully fitted freight. I don't know where it originated, possibly Southampton Docks or somewhere west of Salisbury. It was always pulled by a Nine Elms loco.

Feltham Junction had some unusual fetchers in that the semaphore signals, and most of the ground signals, were motored. It was fully track circuited, including the reception roads. Although it had full Sykes lock and block with Hounslow Junction and Whitton Junctions, and was by track circuit occupation, and bell train description with Feltham East. All points were mechanical. The points to the reception roads were mechanical self unlocking and relocking. As far as I can remember most ground by wire pull, except the exit from the reception roads. There were two ground signals, one for track 1 – 4, and the other for 5 – 10. The signal came off for the selected route. If the route was set for the wrong track, the wrong ground signal came off.

One of the most enjoyable aspects, from my perspective, was that all locos leaving the shed had to telephone our box from the exit signals regardless of whether going out on the main or backing into yard to take a freight out. My job was to answer this phone and to relay the information to the signalman. I got to know some of crews quite well. If the loco were for a freight leaving from the Up Yard, they would come off the loco and run pass the box to a dead end. Once clear of the catch points, the signalman would reverse the road into the Up Yard. Some of the crews offered rides from the dead end to the yard, and on occasion a chance to drive. I had to ask the

signalman if it was all right. One crew who I shall call Driver Bert & Fireman Fred, were always open for a footplate ride. Bert was known as one who would not hang around. Give him the road, and he would go like the clappers.

One very dark winter's evening after the evening rush hour, Fred called up to say that the engine for the Willesden transfer freight was ready to leave and back into the yard. And if I wanted to I could ride along. It was mid week so we knew who the crew was. The signalman said it was OK, and not to trip over the juice rail. The loco was one of the G16 class 4-8-0T's which had been built for pushing the wagons over the hump, but were displaced by 350hp diesels. They were used on transfers to Brent, Neasden and Willesden. She was running bunker first. I climbed up into the cab and off we went. It was pitch black. Bert said that we have to go into a road, pick up a couple wagons, then back out and put them on their train. We had just cleared the yard switches and I was peering along the boiler to look for the wagon when Bert said to Fred. "I don't like the way he's driving." Then he jumped off as did Fred. I could not see a thing in front and had no clue where the wagons were. So I shut off the steam, applied the brakes and came to a stop. The wagons were about a car length ahead of the loco. I buffered up following instructions. Then Bert called up, "Don't move the engine: I am having a pee." It goes without saying that took him at his word and didn't check. Then he calls "O.K.; back her up". So I carefully started to move, expecting them to jump on board. Putting it in reverse, I released the steam brake and opened the regulator a little. Then I heard and felt the biggest BANG I have ever know. My first thought was "I have blown her up". Then I stopped the loco to get off: I shut of the regulator, put on the steam brake, and jumped out the cab to the cinders 5 feet

below. I remember lying on my back, and looking up to see Bert and Fred staggering around laughing and the train stopped. They had put a detonator (torpedo) under the first wheel. I was O.K. but a little shaken. Life on the railway certainly went with a bang.

Book Review

Recently while in London I "discovered" two very interesting railway books. The first is *Tiny Trains: A Guide to Britain's Miniature Railways – 2008/2009* and the other is *Little Puffers: A Guide to Britain's Narrow Gauge Railways – 2008/2009*. Each of these publications contains a wealth of information on both the miniature and narrow gauge railways of Great Britain. These books give detailed information on approximately 100 railways that includes location, length of the line, track gauge, and rolling stock including engines. What I found interesting to do was to read about each of these different railways and then check on YouTube for films of these different trains. For most, I did find a nice variety of materials to watch – not the same as being there but close! If you like railways of this type I would encourage you to purchase these two books – approximately £7 each. You can find more ordering details from www.stillsteaming.com. I did find at this location new editions of these books.

Dick Robinson