

THE 8D ASSOCIATION

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The Journal of the 8D Association
Volume 3 Number 2
June 2013



Frodsham Junction

Frodsham Junction looking west from the Halton Curve on 25 July 1975. The train was 1Z54 a Rhymney to Southport service hauled by locomotive number 46 028. **Photo by David Lennon.**

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Volume 3 Number 1

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Editor



A War Department Austerity Class locomotive heads south past Norman Road Runcorn with a mixed goods train in the late 1950s.

Photo by Roy Gough

The 2013 site visits programme has got off to a very good start. Our first visit on 6 April 2013 was to the Cheshire Lines Committee (CLC) North Liverpool Extension Line. The visit took place on Grand National day which was very appropriate for a route that carried specials to Aintree from the time of opening right up until 1963. 8D Members walked from Knotty Ash station to West Derby station. It was fascinating to hear the recollections of members who had last visited Knotty Ash on a Rugby League special over 50 years ago. At West Derby members were able to go inside the station building which is now a gas fire showroom.

The second visit on 4 May 2013 was to the St Helens & Runcorn Gap Railway at Reginald Road. This visit turned out to be amazing. The section of line between the Liverpool and Manchester Railway and Reginald Road was located on an embankment. That embankment is scheduled for demolition. At the time of the visit the route of the line had been cleared of trees which had exposed all manner of interesting features. Members came away from the visit with a distant signal arm, pieces of permanent way, LMS inscribed ceramic telegraph insulation pots and bricks manufactured at Collins Green colliery. Also discovered on the day were the bases of the two Clock Face No.1 signal boxes that had stood on the site. There is a feature about the day's events on page 15. The timing of the visit could not have been better. An important piece of our railway heritage has been photographed and recorded just in time. This of course is one of the key aims of our group. **Paul Wright**

News Round-up

Test Train Run to Energy from Waste Plant at Folly Lane

Early on Tuesday morning 7 May 2013 a Freightliner class 66 locomotive visited the sidings of the Energy from Waste Plant at Folly Lane. The locomotive ran along all of the new sidings and was probably the first locomotive to do so. The locomotive was run to test the new lines. While the Freightliner locomotive was on site the scheduled DBS tank train arrived. This was possibly the first time that two trains had been on the branch since the early 1990s.

Trains of pelletized waste from Greater Manchester could start to run to Folly Lane from July 2013. The trains will bring waste from the Greater Manchester Waste Disposal facilities at Bredbury, Northenden and Dean Lane. The waste material will be burned to generate electricity for the Ineos Chlor plant at Weston Point.

Widnes South subway entrance exposed by demolition



The up side of Widnes South station was left exposed to view for the first time in more than a century following the demolition of the '*Railway and Commercial*' pub during the third week of May 2013. In the photograph above taken on 17 May 2013 the bricked up north portal of the station subway can be seen.

St Helens Great Central Railway (GCR) Engine Shed

The GCR engine shed that served St Helens Central station (the original one) and the adjacent goods yard is still standing after being closed for nearly 90 years. It was visited by 8D members Terry Callaghan, John Wilson and Paul Wright on 4 May 2013 and found to be in good condition. It is currently being used as a carpentry workshop. Although there have been alterations and extensions the railway origins of the building are clearly recognisable. Sections of track are still in situ embedded in the floor of the building.

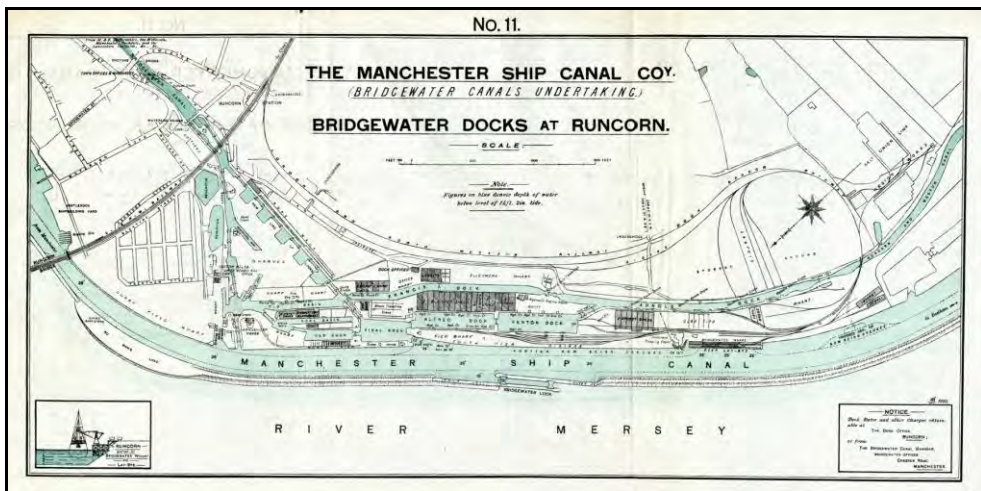
The St Helens GCR shed opened in 1900 when passenger services were introduced onto the Lowton St Mary – St Helens line. The shed had two roads, watering facilities and a turntable. In 1923 it became part of the LNER who closed it in the 1920s. However it continued to be used as part of the goods station until that was closed by BR on 4 January 1965.

From this edition forward the news round-up will be a regular feature. Members are encouraged to send in any information that would be worthy of inclusion.

Folly Lane Branch and Weston Point Railway

The LNWR Runcorn Dock Branch Railway

In 1868 the London and North Western Railway came to Runcorn when a high level bridge was completed over the River Mersey to provide a direct route from London to Liverpool. Prior to this, trains travelled via Warrington and Earlstown Junction to complete the journey. In the same year, a single track branch was constructed from the up side of Runcorn Station to serve the busy, expanding dock areas where the Bridgewater canal joined the River Mersey.



The above map shows the dock area and railway system around the time of completion of the Manchester Ship Canal, in 1893.

In 1882, a brine pipeline was built from Marbury to Weston Point. Brine became the basic raw material for the chemical industry in this area, and the rapid expansion of chemical production soon followed. By the turn of the 20th century the Castner Kellner Alkali Company, and Weston Point Salt works were in production, and the need to move raw materials and products by rail was increasing.

Initially this was accommodated by extending the existing rail network alongside the Runcorn and Weston canal, and dock areas into Castner Kellner site. By the early 1900's the railway system was serving the dock complex, Castner Kellner, Weston Point salt works, a number of sandstone quarries and other companies.

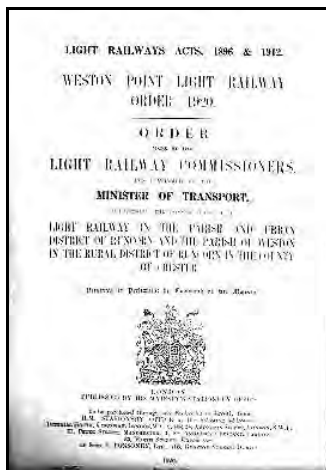


The photo to the left shows the scale of activity at Runcorn Docks in the late 19th century, a line of wagons can be seen in the sidings to the left of the dock.

The Weston Point Light Railway

Soon, the original system was struggling to cope with the volume of traffic, and the Castner Kellner Alkali Company was keen to upgrade it. Several unsuccessful attempts were made to achieve this, but the lack of available land prevented any real progress. It was not until 1920 that progress was made with the LNWR agreeing to build a single track branch line from the main line to a point known as Folly Lane, where it would fan out into the exchange sidings. For this to happen the sidings had to be upgraded to take an increased axle load, and connection to the site was made via a new branch which crossed Sandy Lane and Cheshyres Lane.

The upgrading of these sidings was carried out by Castner Kellner s under 'The Weston Point Light Railway Order', sealed on 2 Dec. 1920. The company appointed Col. Holman F Stephens as the engineer for this work, and the branch and sidings opened in 1922.



The cover of the Light Railway order.

The sidings originally consisted of two main fans divided by a level crossing at Sandy Lane. There were also many of the original private lines and sidings connecting the WPLR with the quarries, dock area and chemical plants at Weston Point.

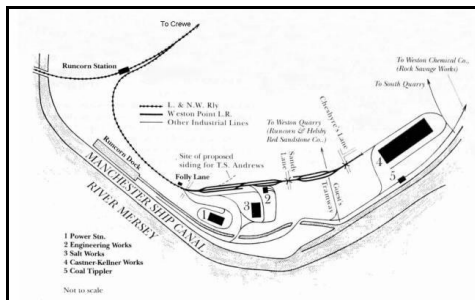
As the chemical production sites expanded, becoming ICI in 1926, the rail networks within the complex became very comprehensive, and expanded into Rocksavage site, a distance of around 2 miles from the main line connection. All manner of raw materials and chemical products were transported along the Weston Point Light Railway.

Privately owned steam locos were employed throughout the system as far as the Folly Lane interchange until 1960, when they were replaced with diesel traction.

Until the 1970's the system was very busy, operating round the clock, with significant quantities of coal traffic coming in for Castner's power station, and limestone for calcium carbide production. When these ceased, the system operated mainly

on a daytime basis, and few raw materials came to site other than methanol. Traffic also continued to decline as fewer products were shipped out by rail; caustic soda, salt, and chlorine being the last.

In the late 1980's, due to falling traffic, the cost of maintaining motive power, and employing their own drivers and shunters, ICI made a decision to pay British Rail to carry out all their shunting work for them. In the early 1990's rail traffic ceased from Castner Kellner site altogether, and salt traffic from Weston Point Salt works ended in 1999.



A map of the new Weston Point Light Railway system showing the facilities it served.

A trip along the branch in photographs



To the left (*photo by Les Fifoot*) is a view looking towards Runcorn station from Greenway Road. The beginning of what is now known as the Folly Lane branch can be seen just beyond the bridge. The crossover facilitates movement of traffic to and from the branch.

Centre left (*Photo by Les Fifoot*) is a view of the junction with the main line, taken from Runcorn station. Originally there were additional sidings in the car park area, and Runcorn main goods sidings were behind the up platform to the left of the picture.



In the bottom left picture (*by Richard W Mercer*) the branch is seen in the first half of the 1960s. One of the early AC electrics an AL1 type (class 81 after 1973) number E3010 heads towards the main line with a train of timber that had probably come from the docks. To the right can be seen the goods yard at Runcorn station which appears to be full of all kinds of wagons. The Folly Lane branch was electrified as part of the Liverpool and Crewe electrification scheme in 1961. Electric trains operated on it up to the late 1980s.



In the bottom right view from May 2013 (*Photo by Les Fifoot*) the simplified and de-electrified line curves down towards Weston Point at the rear of the Liverpool platform.

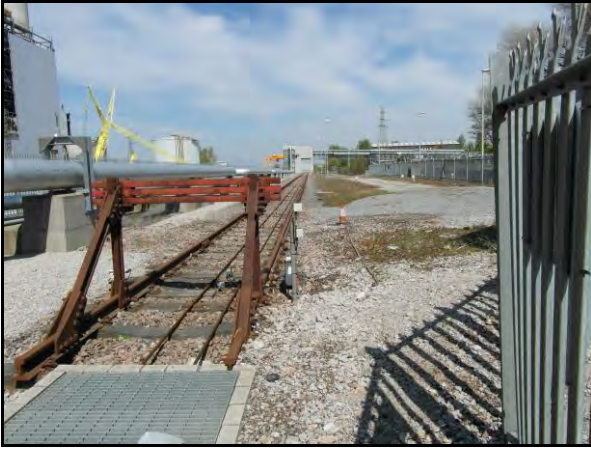




Just before the main sidings west of Picow Farm Road, a branch served the former Mersey Power Runcorn Power Station, seen in the picture above shortly after closure around 1970. The main sidings for ICI can be seen in front of the building. Note the full coal wagons for Castner's power station on the left of the picture. The dirt track in the foreground was Picow Farm Road, as it was then.



The main sidings between Folly Lane and Sandy Lane. They originally fanned out to serve Weston Point salt works, and engineering works. A caustic loading facility can just be seen above the tree. Additional facilities have been constructed to serve the new power station. These are just off the left picture to the right.



In the picture above (by John Wilson) a train of tanks prepares to depart from the caustic loading facility. The facility opened in 2002.

When the loading facility opened there were four trains per week running on weekdays except on Wednesdays. Two trains were run by English Welsh and Scottish (EWS) and one by Direct Rail Services (DRS).

By May 2013 only two trains per week ran both operated by DB Schenker (successor to EWS). In the picture top left (by Les Fifoot) is the end of the line on 6 May 2013. The caustic loading facility can be seen just to the right of the buffer stop. Locomotives do not operate beyond the loading facility. Wagons are pulled through it by cable worked by a 'mule'. The cables that haul the mule can be seen running in the centre of the track.

Originally, the line continued from this point across Sandy Lane where there were a number of sidings. Up until the 1980s it was common to see lines of wagons at this location. It was to the south of Sandy Lane that the Weston Point Railway proper began. The line continued south to a further level crossing at Cheshyres Lane/Bankes Lane where it entered the Castner Kellner site.

In the picture below left (by Les Fifoot) is a view of the site of Sandy Lane crossing on 6 May 2013. To the right the same view in 1991 as 08703 brings a train of loaded tank wagons across Sandy Lane to the sidings west of Picow Farm Road.





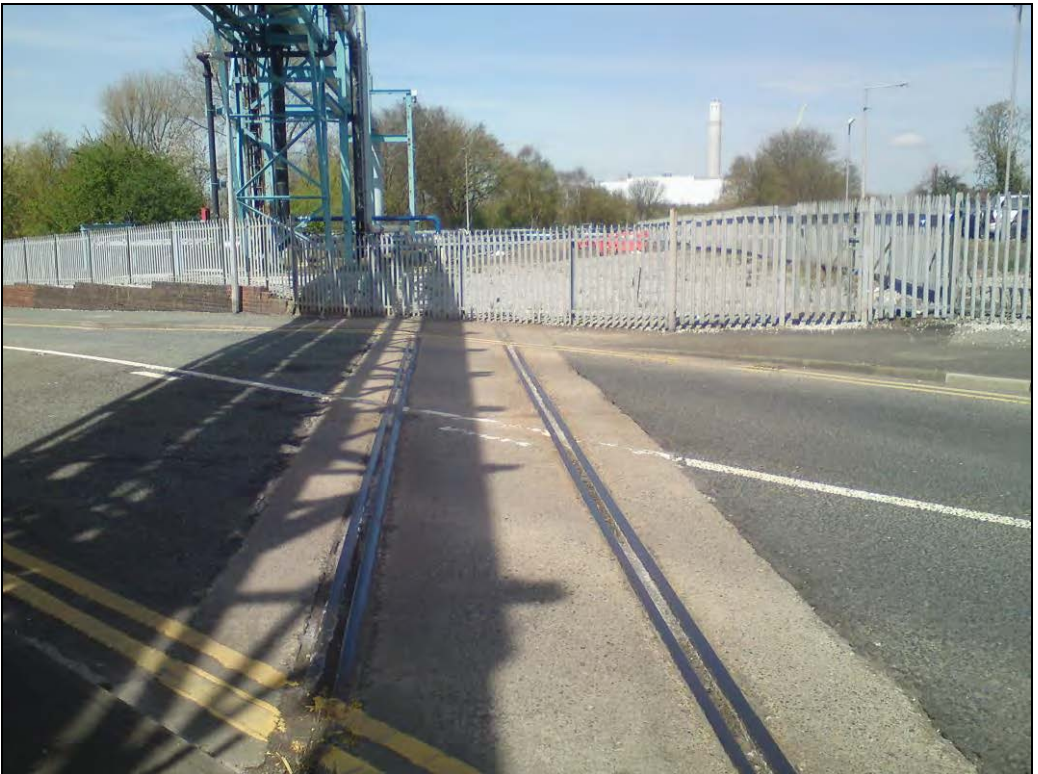
The picture above (by Les Fifoot) is looking towards the main line from Sandy Lane crossing on 6 May 2013. . No signs of the once busy railway sidings remain. Below is same location in 1991 (Photo by Les Fifoot).



The view below left (*by Les Fifoot*) is looking south from Sandy Lane crossing on 5 May 2013. This was the location of the second fan of sidings. The same view is seen below right (*by Les Fifoot*) in 1991. An 08 shunter brings a train of full tank wagons towards the main sidings off Picow Farm Road. By that time, only a single siding remained, which was all but disused. From the main sidings the wagons would be worked away by a main line locomotive.



Below (*by Les Fifoot*) is all that remains of the crossing at Cheshyres Lane/Bankes Lane on 5 May 2013. At this point the railway entered Castner Kellner site. The new power station can be seen in the distance.





Until the latter part of the 20th century, the disposal waste material from industrial sites was poorly regulated. Significant quantities were removed by rail to the disused Weston quarry site via a line which once crossed Weston Road at this point. Looking towards Castner Kellner site from Weston Road, where the track once crossed.

Although the Folly Lane branch is not what it once was, and the Weston Point Railway has closed completely, there is set to be a rail renaissance at Runcorn with the opening of the new energy from waste plant at Picow Farm Road. **Article by Les Fifoot**



The present day scene on the Folly Lane branch as seen on 19 April 2013 as the Friday working from Warrington Arpley to Folly Lane arrives at its destination. On this occasion the train had only three tanks. Photo by Paul Wright

Working Target 92 – Widnes to Folly Lane



A coal train heads south over the River Mersey in 1968. Target 92 would have looked just like this except the locomotive would have been running boiler first. Photo by Les Fifoot

Until its closure in 1964 Target 92 was a Widnes Locomotive Shed working that involved the transportation of loaded coal wagons from Widnes Deviation sidings to the power station at Weston Point. It was then worked by Garston and by Sutton Oak Shed. 8D Association members Rod Dixon, Barry Nolan and Colin Turton all worked Target 92 and the following article has been put together using their memories of the turn.

The ICI power station at Weston Point used vast quantities of coal and it was supplied by six trains in every 24 hours. Coal was brought to Widnes Deviation sidings from the Yorkshire area and then tripped to the power station as target 92. Target 92 used two brake vans one at each end of the wagons.

Barry Nolan explained how "In the early 1960's I was in a link that included Target 92 which involved taking train loads of coal from the Deviation Sidings to Folly Lane in Runcorn. The coal was destined for the power station at Weston Point, so Target 92 ran throughout the day and night. During each 8 hour shift, we delivered 2 train loads of up to 24 wagons, but, for some reason, always returned with just the Guards Van in tow, so I've no idea what happened to the empty wagons. We usually had a Class 8 assigned to the job, but when these weren't available we had to manage with a Super 'D,' which was a poor substitute because of the difficulties involved in maintaining steam pressure and the sheer discomfort for the crew.

The first leg of the journey took us (Tender First) to the sidings at Ditton Junction where we 'ran around' the train to position the locomotive, right way round, at the head of the train. This is where our troubles often started. At Ditton Junction, the main Liverpool - London line narrowed from 4 tracks (up & down fast & slow lines) to a double track, so Target 92 had to

compete with express passenger and freight trains for a 'slot' to travel to Runcorn".

On 10 August 1962 Colin Turton was on firing turn on Target 92 having started his shift at 10.00 pm. On that occasion the locomotive allocated to the task was an ex War Department 2-8-0 Austerity class locomotive number 90107. It was after 11.00pm when Colin's locomotive left Widnes shed. It made the move to Ditton as described by Barry Nolan. After leaving Ditton the locomotive had difficulty getting up the bank to the bridge over the River Mersey. "When we got onto the viaduct at the point where it curves towards the bridge our train stalled. The driver tried putting down sand but it was no use. I had to climb down onto the track with a shovel. The viaduct is very high at that point and there is only a railing to stop you falling off which was quite unnerving. I shovelled grit from the track onto the rails in front of the wheels and eventually this worked and we were able to get the train moving".

Behind Target 92 that night was the 11.50pm Liverpool to Penzance express. On the first leg of its journey it was being worked by an electric locomotive. "When the West County express passed us at Runcorn he was furious and made his displeasure known to us" explained Colin.

It is no surprise then that according to Barry Nolan "signalmen were justifiably wary of 'giving us a road' (allowing us to travel) because the sheer weight of our load made our journey up the incline (bank) to the bridge very slow. In really unfavourable climatic conditions, we were sometimes unable to get traction and ground to a halt which required a bank engine to be sent from Widnes. These factors made the Ditton signalmen very nervous so they held us in the siding until they felt we wouldn't impede other traffic".

According to Barry "It wasn't unusual to wait for more than an hour before they felt comfortable enough to give us a run. These long waits created huge problems for us because we were forbidden to allow the locomotive to vent surplus steam (Blow Off) because of the noise nuisance this created. In order to keep the steam pressure below the maximum of 250 psi, we had to close the dampers and allow the fire to die down. When we got a green signal, it was necessary to get the fire hot again as quickly as possible in order to have enough power to climb the incline. Unfortunately, this was seldom possible because of the poor quality of the coal we were allocated at Widnes and the impossibly short time available to raise sufficient steam. The only thing in our favour was the gradient in Ditton Sidings which sloped down, towards the junction, and gave us some initial assistance before we encountered the upward slope of the bank. Our progress up the incline was always laborious, slow, and often punctuated with episodes of 'slipping' until we reached the Runcorn Bridge, which was level and allowed us to pick up a little speed".

Target 92 passed through Runcorn station and was brought to a stand just clear of the junction with the Folly Lane branch. The trains were then reversed down the branch. Barry explained how "This had to be done very carefully as only the locomotive and the brake vans were braked and if the train had gained too much momentum, it would have been impossible to stop. We were always conscious of the 'Trap Points' (set of points designed to deliberately derail runaway traffic) at Folly Lane which, for some inexplicable reason, diverted runaway traffic directly into the signal box. Shortly before my time on the 92 link, a runaway train had demolished the signal box. Fortunately, the very large lady who was acting as signalman realised the train wasn't going to stop and, according to eye witnesses, beat the prevailing land - speed record in exiting her post before it was completely destroyed".

The wagons would be put into the sidings next to the power station and by the early 1960s a diesel shunter worked them into the power station. Colin Turton is not exactly sure how the empties were worked away from Folly Lane but he recalled that "There were daily services of



The ICI power station at Weston Point seen just after closure in 1970. Target 92 was operated to serve this power station with coal.

Photo by Les Fifoot

empty wagons from Folly Lane to Crewe so I assume they went out that way. I remember we usually came back to Widnes with the brake vans but now and again we would bring some tank wagons back with us”.

When Widnes Locomotive Depot closed on 16 May 1964 responsibility for Target 92 was transferred to Garston (Speke Junction). The Garston crews were unable to achieve the two trips per shift that was required which caused complaints from the power station. Sutton Oak shed was asked to do a trial to see if they could work Target 92. They were able to do the two runs per shift and won the work.

Rod Dixon was based at Sutton Oak at that time and remembers working Target 92 as a fireman. Rod recalled that “At Sutton Oak we used 2-8-0 Austerities for Target 92. They were slow but powerful engines and ideal for the job but not very comfortable for the crews. We went bunker first to Widnes deviation sidings and would usually collect 30 wagons with a brake van at each end. After running round at Ditton we would be running boiler first to Runcorn. We were able to do the two trips per shift and sometimes more besides. Such as moving wagons from Sutton Manor to Widnes or tank wagons up to St Helens”.

On 4 January 1965 Rod Dixon was involved in a train crash whilst working Target 92. It occurred when his train was making its reverse move from the main line at Runcorn station onto the Folly Lane branch. Rod remembers “As we were reversing from the up main line, crossing the down, and heading onto the branch a northbound electric hauled freight train hit us. It made a hell of a mess, scattering wagons all over the line in the cutting at the south of Runcorn station. The electric locomotive ended up on the branch but it’s crew were fine. I ran to the brake van of the electric freight and found the guard to be in a very dazed condition. A London bound express was stuck at Runcorn station”. The electric hauled freight had run through a red signal its brakes having frozen due to the cold conditions.

When Sutton Oak Shed closed on 19 June 1967 Target 92 became the responsibility of Garston once again. With the end of steam Target 92 was usually worked by class 40 locomotives until the power station closed in 1970.

Target 92 gained notoriety along the whole length of the Liverpool - London main line because of its ability to significantly affect the timetables of all those who travelled the route. **With thanks to Rod Dixon, Barry Nolan and Colin Turton.**

Site visit to Clock Face No.1 and SH&RGR Locomotive Works – 4 May 2013



8D Association members explore the track-bed of the St Helens & Runcorn Gap Railway at the location of Clock Face Number 1 signal box on 4 May 2013. Photo by Terry Callaghan

On 4 May 2013 the 8D Association had a visit to a section of the St Helens & Runcorn Gap Railway between Reginald Road and the site of Intersection Bridge over the Liverpool and Manchester Railway. The visit also included the site of the railway workshops at which the St Helens company had built its locomotives. One of the last to come out of the works being White Raven in 1864. The LNWR took over the works in September 1864 and converted it to a sheeting shed and stores depot. It fell out of railway use during the 20th century but survived in industrial use until recent times. It has been cleared in recent years and is set to be developed with housing.

The section of line adjacent to the works had recently been cleared of trees which had exposed much of railway interest. Originally the St Helens & Runcorn Gap line had been a single track railway and the area that was visited had been towards the high point of the Sutton inclined plane (a steep incline that was cable worked). By 1850 the steep incline had been eased for locomotive working and the line was doubled. This led to more efficient working and over the following decades traffic levels built up.

By the 1880s the line at this point was quadruple and there were adjacent sidings. Clock Face number 1 signal box controlled the section of line. It was a LNWR Type 4 box with a 34 lever frame and opened in April 1885.

During the site visit 8D member and former Sutton Oak fireman (and later Garston driver) Rod Dixon, who had worked the line from the late 1950s through to its closure as a through route in November 1981, explained the layout of the line at Clock Face number 1. Rod also informed members about workings along the line. An interesting fact given by Rod was that coaches for rugby league specials were often stabled in sidings opposite Clock Face number 1, on the up side of the line.

The 1884 signal box was badly damaged by fire in January 1961. Rod remembered the event and explained how for a few weeks traffic had to be hand signalled along the section of line and that only the up and down goods lines could be used.

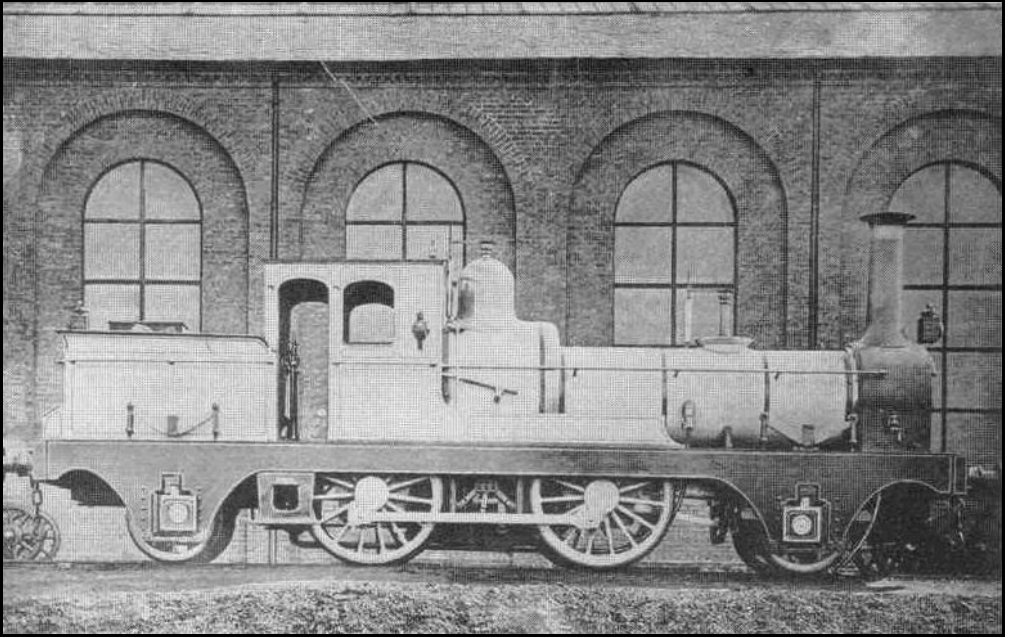
In February 1961 a replacement box opened just to the south of the original. It was a BR LMR type 15 box with a 40 lever frame. It closed on 14 December 1969 when the line between Sutton Oak Junction and Farnworth & Bold was singled. During the visit the foundations of both signal boxes could be seen. The ballast from the last surviving line was also very visible during the visit. It had survived until it was taken out of use on 10 October 1987 (linking Sutton Manor Colliery with Sutton Oak Junction) although regular traffic had ceased by 1985.

Many artefacts were found during the site visit perhaps the most amazing of all being a BR distant signal arm which now resides with member Terry Callaghan.

Thankfully much was recorded on camera as a development will soon sweep everything away.



8D members Rod Dixon, Joe Cowley and Paul Wright (left to right) stand on the remains of the 1961 LMR Clock Face number 1 signal box during the visit of 4 May 2013. Photo by Terry Callaghan



In the picture above the 'White Raven' locomotive stands outside the St Helens Canal & Railway Company works in 1864. Below is the same view taken on 4 May 2013. Photo by Paul Wright



Royal Train over the St Helens & Runcorn Gap Railway



Looking west from Widnes West Deviation Junction signal box in 1977 as the Royal Train approaches on route from Edge Hill to St Helens. Photo by David Lennon

Readers will recall from previous journals that in the last two years the Royal Train has passed through our area of interest using the Halton curve on two occasions. Both trips over the line were captured on camera and through publication in the journal the events are recorded for posterity.

Recently I was told that in 1977 the Royal Train had passed over local freight lines on route from Edge Hill to St Helens Shaw Street (now Central). The train travelled via Ditton Junction, Widnes West Deviation, Widnes No.7 signal box, Widnes No.1 signal box and Sutton Oak Junction signal box. No royals were on board for that leg of the journey. They had left the train at Edge Hill and re-joined it at St Helens.

Only a few weeks after being told of this event a photograph taken by former signalman David Lennon was published on the Flickr website showing the Royal Train approaching Widnes West Deviation Junction. The view captures a rare moment in the history of the route between Ditton Junction and St Helens. The Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh visited St Helens on 21 June 1977 so this is the likely date of the view shown above.

It would be interesting to find out about other trips that the Royal Train may have made along the lines of South Lancashire and North Cheshire. In particular along lines that became freight only or which later closed. With the sheer volume of information that is starting to come to light about our local railways I have no doubt that we will discover more about the activity of Royal Trains.

Paul Wright

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DIRECTIONS: Maple Crescent is conveniently situated just off the A562 between Warrington & Widnes. From the A562 turn into Inglenook Road then left into Ash Road then right into Maple Crescent.

Buses run on a regular basis via Warrington Road (A562) between Runcorn, Widnes & Warrington

OPENING TIMES

Monday.....	Closed
Tuesday	10.00 - 4.30
Wednesday	10.00 - 4.30
Thursday.....	10.00 - 4.30
Friday	10.00 - 4.30
Saturday	10.00 - 4.30
Sunday	Closed



FREE UNRESTRICTED PARKING OUTSIDE THE SHOP



Events Programme

19.00 – Thursday 6th June 2013 – The CLC Halewood Triangle – Led by Paul Wright. Meet at Halewood Triangle Park car park, Okell Drive, Halewood.

10.00 – Saturday 22nd June 2013 – Site visit to Sunny Bank – An opportunity to see the site of the junctions that once existed between the CLC and the GCR/MR Joint Widnes Branch. Meet in the Sunny Bank car park off Barrows Green Lane.

19.00 – Thursday 4th July 2013 – The Garston & Warrington Railway (Sankey Bridges to Fiddlers Ferry) – Led by Richard Mercer. Meet at Sankey Bridges.

11.00 – Saturday 13th July 2013 - Rail Ale Tour of Merseyrail – Led by Joe Cowley. Meet at Widnes station or Liverpool Lime Street. Further details to follow.

Saturday 3rd August 2013 – Fiddlers Ferry Visit – (Time to be confirmed) Another chance to visit Fiddlers Ferry Power station. This time looking at the limestone unloading terminal and the junction with the main line. Will also include a visit to the lagoons. Limited to 15 people. Contact Paul Wright on 0151 630 5132.



'Where is this' competition? (Answers to pwright964@btinternet.com) Photo by David Lennon

- The March competition winner was Arthur Turner. The location was Frodsham