

# ON SHED

## The Journal of the 8D Association

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### Park Lane Goods Station – 1964

A view looking west into Park Lane Goods station in 1964 from the original western portal of the Wapping tunnel. The station had opened in 1830 as Wapping Goods and was the western terminus of the Liverpool & Manchester Railway. **Photo by Jim Peden**

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## Volume 5 Number 4

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### Contents

1. Editorial
2. Society News
4. News Round Up
9. Birkenhead Mollington Street
16. A Career with British Rail Construction Group
22. From the Archive
23. Events

### Editor

I recently travelled from Liverpool Lime Street to Manchester Oxford Road via the world's oldest purpose built passenger railway on an electric train. Although the rolling stock was not new, being a class 319 EMU that had been built in the late 1980s, the journey certainly felt like something new. The Northern Rail unit branded *Northern Electrics* was smartly turned out and clean. The refurbishment that these units have undergone is certainly to a high quality. That journey got me to thinking just how far our railways have come over the last decade or so and its little surprise that they are now so well used.



**Left: Looking east towards Victoria Road from the up side of Widnes Central station in the early 1960s. Photo By Gordon Howarth**

Now most of you will know how keen I am on the railways of yesteryear and I have long had a fascination for what has gone before. In many cases long before I was even born.

That enthusiasm for the past led to my interest in disused stations which in turn led to the creation of the 8D Association. My

fascination for the past does not however blind me to the fascinating developments that are taking place on our railways right now in our own lifetime. The steel wheel on the steel rail is as relevant today as it was nearly 200 years ago and long may it thrive. Locally we are seeing many developments and the biggest of all will be coming to Widnes very soon. More about that though in the March edition of *On Shed*. **Paul Wright**

### 8D Trip to Wapping Tunnel



***The 8D Association pose for the camera at the western portal of the Wapping tunnel on Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> October 2015. Photo by Tony Foster***

On Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> October 2015 the 8D Association visited the world's oldest mainline railway tunnel, the Wapping tunnel, which had been completed in 1829 as part of the Liverpool & Manchester Railway. The visit had originally been scheduled for earlier in the year but had to be postponed due to Chris Iles of the Friends of Williamsons Tunnels becoming seriously ill. The Friends of Williams Tunnels were our hosts for the visit as they are trusted by Liverpool City Council, the tunnels owner, to have the keys to it. Thankfully Chris was sufficiently recovered by October for the visit to go ahead.

The visit commenced at the site of the Park Lane Goods station which had originally been called Wapping goods. Paul Wright explained the history of the site and then members went into the tunnel where they could see many of its original features including fixtures for gas lighting.

At present the entire tunnel cannot be visited because of a flooded section close to the White Street ventilation shaft. The flood has been caused by infill which was pushed into the tunnel in the 1970s when the Park Lane goods station was demolished. It is an aspiration of many local history groups to get the infill removed so that the water can drain away. That would allow easy access right up to Edge Hill.



*The remains of Park Lane signal box seen during the 8D visit to the Wapping tunnel on 17<sup>th</sup> October 2015. Photo by Tony Foster*

During the visit many members commented on the sad state that such a significant historical feature has been allowed to get into. This is a view widely held and there are those who would like to see a museum developed at the tunnel site.

It was a real privilege for the 8D Association to get into the Wapping tunnel and our thanks go out to the Friends of Williamsons Tunnels for being such excellent hosts. We hope that one day we can return and pass through the entire length of the Wapping tunnel. **Paul Wright**

### **The Annual General Meeting**

The 2016 AGM will take place at the Select Security Stadium on Saturday 24<sup>th</sup> January 2016 at 10.00. The AGM will follow the usual format with the associations business being conducted first followed by a guest speaker and then a buffet.

If there are any members who would like to stand for any of the committee posts please send your nomination to the Secretary at [the\\_8d\\_association@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:the_8d_association@yahoo.co.uk) or telephone Paul Wright on 0151 630 5132.

### **New Members**

At the 8D Association membership is currently 71. Welcome to our latest members **Dave Hull** from Southport and **Bob Selwood** from Warrington.

## News Round Up - by Chris Hollins

### Electrification brings more change



***Northern Rail class 319 EMU number 319 369 is seen passing through Rainhill on 15<sup>th</sup> August 2015 with a working to Manchester Victoria. Photo by Doug Birmingham***

The Liverpool Lime Street to Blackpool North diesel service was withdrawn on Mondays to Saturdays from Monday 5th of October 2015 apart from the 07.57 and 17.16 from Lime Street and the 18.03 return working from Blackpool North. A replacement electric service now operates the remainder of the service between Liverpool South Parkway and Liverpool Lime Street to Preston where passengers change on to the next train from there to Blackpool. As compensation, the Hazel Grove to Preston service is now extended to Blackpool North. There will continue to be an hourly through service from Liverpool Lime Street to Blackpool North on Sundays worked by Diesel Multiple Units. As this service is also the stopping service from Liverpool to Wigan North Western it means that no Class 319 EMU's operate between Liverpool, St Helens Central, Wigan North Western and Preston on Sundays.

The change has brought an end to Blackpool drivers manning some of the Liverpool Services, as they are not trained on Class 319 EMU's at present. At the same time it is expected that some of the Liverpool Lime Street to Warrington Bank Quay services will switch to Class 319 operation. Allerton depot is shortly to receive several more Class 319 sets to bring it up to the complement of 20 units in order to operate the December 2015 timetable.

## **Changes at Fiddlers Ferry**

Freightliner heavy haul have started running a Monday to Friday service between Hunterston and Fiddlers Ferry. The train utilises the former Ellesmere Port set of wagons which are still based at Garston. The empty wagons set off on a Monday morning from Garston to Hunterston. Upon arrival they are loaded with departure for Fiddlers Ferry being at 19.38 with the train travelling overnight to arrive at the Power Station around 05.00. After unloading the coal the wagons return empty to Hunterston thus completing a round trip every 24 hours. On Saturday mornings after unloading at the Ferry, the wagons are returned to Garston after reversal at Latchford sidings.

With the start of winter several other coal trains have resumed operation to Fiddlers Ferry Power station. However unlike in previous years where they have come from Liverpool Docks the new workings are coming from Immingham Port. The trains take an unusual route via Barnetby, Scunthorpe, Knottingley, Wakefield, Hebden Bridge, Rochdale, Thorpes Bridge Jct, Ashton Moss North Jct, Stockport, Altrincham, Northwich, Weaver Jct and Acton Grange Jct to Latchford Sidings before reversing and the proceeding to Fiddlers Ferry Power Station.

## **Mersey Gateway**



Pile driving has commenced opposite the site of Hutchison Street Yard in connection with building a new six lane road bridge over the Ditton Junction to Warrington Arpley low level line. The bridge will carry the approach road of Mersey Gateway bridge which is due to open in the autumn of 2017. Works associated with the bridge are already having a significant impact on the Widnes landscape.

Also in connection with the Mersey Gateway a new pedestrian footpath is under construction between Desoto Road and Ashley Way utilising a small part of the former Moor Lane at the point where it ran beneath the GC/MR Widnes Branch (the Widnes loop).

***A view looking east along the Widnes***

***Deviation line on 22<sup>nd</sup> July 2015 as an inspection train heads west towards Liverpool Lime Street. The Mersey Gateway route will pass over the line at this location. Photo by Doug Birmingham***

## Halton Curve Works



*Work was underway on restoring the Halton Curve to a bi-directional railway when this view was taken on 3<sup>rd</sup> September 2015. Photo by Mark Barber*

Commencing in September, work has started on the first stage of the reinstatement

of the Halton Curve to normal two way train services. The engineer's trains run from Crewe Basford Hall to Frodsham Junction via Chester where the Freightliner Class 66 locomotive runs round. After spending several hours on the branch and collecting spoil the train continues to Ditton Yard where the locomotive again runs round, returning the train back to Crewe Basford Hall via Weaver Junction. A mechanical Grab machine is working by the lineside, creating new Drainage and once this has been completed attention will then be turned to refurbishing the track and installing new signalling and pointwork at both Halton and Frodsham Junctions.

On Friday the 24th of October, the Northern Belle traversed the Halton Curve twice in the same day. It was operating a charter from Crewe to Liverpool Lime Street via Chester. It then ran back to Crewe via Weaver Junction before returning to Liverpool again via Chester. The empty stock returned back to Crewe in the evening via Weaver Junction.

## Eighty Years since end of Trams in Warrington

This year marks the 80th anniversary of the end of trams in Warrington which ceased in 1935. The former depot in Mersey Street had previously been used by a local gas company. One of the trams survives after being found in use as a bowling club room premises, and is undergoing restoration at the Merseyside Heritage Tram depot in Taylor Street Birkenhead.

## Major works for Liverpool Lime Street

Liverpool Lime Street station is to undergo a £34 million pound refurbishment commencing 2016. Two new platforms will be added to the station which may include reinstating the former Platforms 10 and 11 which were taken out of use in the late 1960's. A hotel is to be added along with a new restaurant and shops.

## Class 59 at Edge Hill



*Left. Class 59 number 59 003 at the Liverpool Biomass terminal on 16<sup>th</sup> November 2015. Photo by Stuart Daniels*

Over the weekend of November 7th and 8th, GBRF's only class 59 no 59003 Yeoman Highlander was stabled in Edge

Hill Gullet sidings. GBRF brought the sole Class 59 diesel 59003 Yeoman Highlander that they own, to Edge Hill for use shuttling Biomass trains between Liverpool Docks and Gullet Sidings en-route to Drax Power Station. The locomotive which was purchased from German operator Heavy Haul International was stabled at Edge Hill over the weekend of November the 7th and 8th, sharing siding space with fellow ex European Class 66 no 66749 one of three Class 66's that GBRF purchased from the Netherlands. On Sunday the 8th of November they were joined by Class 66 no 66760 which is one of the last batch of Class 66's built by Progress Rail at their Muncie USA factory, this later left that evening on a Liverpool Docks to Drax Biomass train.

## New EMUs for Merseyrail

Merseyrail are all set to go ahead with advertising to suppliers for the purchase of 52 new 3 car electric multiple units. These will be owned by Merseyrail and placed with the operator of the Merseyrail Franchise which is currently the Netherlands Railways. Costing up to £400 million pound, the new trains are expected to enter service commencing late 2019 and will have provision for the fitting of pantographs as well as third rail pick up shoes, enabling them to be used on future overhead electrified lines.

## Traffic News

On Saturday 7th of November, Two Devon and Cornwall Class 56 diesels double headed a train of refurbished Great Western Railway HST trailer vehicles through Warrington Bank Quay. Sandwiched between two barrier vehicles, the carriages where en-route from the Wabtec factory at Kilmarnock to Plymouth Laira Depot and, although First Great Western rebranded itself as Great Western Railway in September and introduced a new Green Livery, the carriages had been repainted into the previous First Great Western blue livery.



Several Virgin Pendolino sets have been seen with revised door colours instead of the usual black and white stripes. All of the sets are having their doors refurbished at Edge Hill Downhill depot. When released back to traffic, several units have doors which match the normal bodyside colour of Silver, while on the 7th of October, set 390 010 was noted at Runcorn on the 13.47 Liverpool Lime Street to London Euston service with the doors painted in a dark grey scheme. It has since been confirmed that this is the new correct colour for the doors, to comply with the Disability Discrimination Act.

From the 30th of September 2015 Colas Rail Freight have been using their Class 70 diesels on fuelling trials hauling the 12.58 Carlisle Yard to Chirk Cronospan sidings and the 22.25 Chirk to Carlisle Yard timber trains. These have replaced Class 66 diesels on both trains.

As a result of the mothballing of the Hot Mill rolling line at Llanwern Steelworks from the 26th of August 2015 the daily steel train workings from Dee Marsh Junction have been diverted to run to Margam Yard. Shotton Steel Works will now be supplied with products from Port Talbot steel works for finishing.

### **Prototype Deltic 60<sup>th</sup> Birthday**



***The prototype 'Deltic' on the original Garston and Warrington line just to the west of Widnes Dock Junction in the 1950s. Photo by Alan Robinson***

The prototype Deltic diesel locomotive celebrates its 60th birthday this month. When completed at the Vulcan Foundry at Earlestown, with electrical equipment being supplied from English Electric's subsidiary company Dick Kerr and Sons works at Preston, it was allocated to Speke Junction where it was used on local trip freight workings in the Widnes and Warrington area. Later on it migrated to operating Liverpool Lime Street to London Euston passenger duties, before being transferred to the Eastern Region.

## Memories of Birkenhead Mollington Street Motive Power Depot, The Men and The Area - Part 1 – by Dennis Flood



*Birkenhead Mollington Street shed on 5<sup>th</sup> March 1967. British Railways standard class locomotive number 73141 is seen standing on one of the shed roads. Photo by Richard Mercer*

It is significant that I find myself putting together this article almost exactly 30 years after the closure of the Birkenhead Mollington Street depot in November 1985. How appropriate that is. Birkenhead Shed was the furthest outpost of the Great Western Railway and a depot was opened on the site at Mollington Street in 1878. It was under the joint control of the London & North Western Railway (LNWR) and the Great Western Railway (GWR) as part of the Birkenhead Joint Railway (BJR).

Both companies had their own eight-road sheds with coaling stages and turntables. The sheds were located side by side.

Nationalisation in 1948 saw the LMS/GWR depot (the LNWR having been absorbed by the LMS in 1923) taken under the control of the London Midland Region of British Railways with the shed code 6C. Some years later it became 8H.

In 1951, the former LMS (LNWR) shed was reduced in size and a new diesel shed comprising of 2 roads was built. These roads were numbered and subsequently became known as No.1 and No.2 diesel shed roads with No.2 road being the nearest to the former LMS steam shed. A depot fuel point was also provided.

In 1951, three years after British Railways came into existence; the opportunity was taken to amalgamate the similar functions of clerical staff and messing facilities at both the former LMS and GWR depots into one entity using the facilities available at the former LMS depot.

As can be imagined this did not impress the former GWR staff at Birkenhead. They argued that upon arrival with a locomotive, or taking one off the shed, from the former GWR depot they had to walk further after booking on/off duty at the former LMS shed.

In order to make things easier for ex-GWR drivers and Firemen (and to pacify them) a simple solution was found. A hole was made in the supporting retaining wall between the two sheds to allow the men to take a short cut to the former LMS shed so they could book off duty, put engine repair cards in, or use the mess facilities there. For some years afterwards the former GWR men were known as the 'hole in the wall gang'. Some years later a locker room was situated between the two former LMS/GWR depots and the hole was finally bricked up. The 'new' brickwork could still clearly be seen at the time of final closure of the depot in November 1985. Evidence and memories of the 'hole in the wall gang' were no more.

I have always thought that it is the men (and women) who make a depot and not the other way around. Birkenhead Mollington Street was a remarkable place to work at and I must say that there were some equally quite remarkable characters there as well. I was fortunate to have been a driver at Mollington Street before moving on to other positions within British Railways and I would like to share some of the quite hilarious things which some of them did during my time there during the course of a few of these written articles.



***The coaling plant at Birkenhead Mollington Street seen on 5 March 1967. Photo by Richard Mercer***

This is true, of course, of all sheds and those former drivers and firemen who may be reading this article will concur with that view having known their own 'characters' at their respective depots, they may have even been 'characters' themselves.

I will also give mention to Guards, Shunters and others in due course since they all played an important role in the day to day operation of the railway, and some were equally as 'mad' as the drivers if not more so.

Birkenhead Mollington Street was a cosmopolitan mixture of men from numerous depots which had closed at the end, or near the end, of steam in the mid and late 1960s. There were former Edge Hill, Bank Hall, Brunswick,

Aintree, Walton on the Hill and Speke Junction men there. This influx of men from Liverpool depots made the place seem like a comedy store and the input from the Birkenhead men just made the entire place appear to be a laugh a minute. As well as natives of Merseyside there were also ex-Carlisle Kingmoor, Lostock Hall, Wigan Springs Branch, Chester, Crewe, Abergavenny and Holyhead men there. The vast majority of the men there, like all depots, were responsible men who did their jobs very professionally. A finer body of men I could not have wished to work with.

The Link structure for drivers at Birkenhead was quite straightforward and did not really change a great deal during the time I was there as most of the work remained quite constant. A `Link` being a fixed number of drivers with a fixed amount of work in week by week order and this rotated each week so that a driver took the next week's line of work in his link. There was a DMU Link which contained the senior drivers at the depot and this contained 10 drivers. Then there were 3 Goods Links comprising Links, 1, 2 and 3 and each of them contained 15 senior drivers. There was also a driver's Shed Link, and this was known as the Bank Head Link, and it comprised of the three standard shifts of 07:00-15:00, 15:00-23:00 & 23:00-07:00 Monday-to-Friday and 07:00-15:00, 15:00-23:00 on Saturdays.

There were three regular `medically restricted` drivers in the Shed Link, one of whom, Driver Jack Baker (originally from Abergavenny) was a Mr Pickwick character straight out of a Charles Dickens novel. He could peel a whole orange whilst it was still in his pocket. He would then offer you a piece of it covered in his oily finger marks. I always politely declined.

There was no Saturday night 23:00 shed turn at Birkenhead but a driver booked on at 00:01-08:00/08:00-16:00 and 16:00-24:00 on a Sunday to cover shed duties. All these diagrams, as they were called, also had a shed secondman booking on at the same time as the driver. The largest driver's Link at Mollington Street was the `Extra Link` and this contained 47 drivers, including yours truly, in it. Drivers in this Link were always shown `spare` and would be marked in the link, for example, as 14:00 Spl or 15:00 Spl. The letters `Spl` simply meant `Special`. In other words, book on as you're told.

The depot Roster Clerk would roster men from the Extra Link to cover vacant work in the DMU, Goods and Shed Links when drivers were either on leave or off sick. He kept a book called the `Lame, Sick and Lazy` book and used that when rostering cover for those who were `unavailable`. The Supervisor also had access to this book.

The Extra Link was, in my opinion, the best Link at the depot since we had a wide variety of work and route knowledge to go with it. Extra Link drivers also covered work on the Mersey/Wirral d.c. electrified system, or the `Inter-Villages` as we called it. There were two depots covering the Liverpool Area d.c. electrified railway on the Wirral and they were located at Birkenhead North and Birkenhead Central. We also used to refer to these services as `The Sparks`. Birkenhead North was simply known as `North` and contained drivers who covered work specifically to New Brighton and West Kirby. These drivers were known as the `Wirral` men. Birkenhead Central was known to all as just `BC`. It covered work between Rock Ferry and Liverpool Central and these drivers were known as the `Mersey` men.

Drivers from both these depots worked over the entire Wirral d.c. electrified network and anyone who has travelled on those lines can appreciate why we called the

services the 'Inter Villages'. It is worth mentioning at this point that Mollington Street was also known as the 'South Shed', to differentiate it from the depots at 'North' and 'BC'. The 'South Shed' always provided driver cover for both 'North' and 'BC'. Men at 'North' and 'BC' only ever worked d.c. electrified services as that is all they were trained to carry out. In the days of the original Mersey Railway at the introduction of the electric service to Liverpool in 1903 drivers were known as 'Motormen'. A few of them used to be known as 'Motormouth'.

If a freight job was cancelled at Mollington Street and the driver was in one of the three Goods Links he could be required to work on the 'Inter Villages'. An instruction to do this was usually followed by a loud explosion of annoyance when a supervisor sent him 'down below' to Birkenhead Central or Birkenhead North. Expletives were usually mixed with 'I'm a senior man doing a junior man's work' followed by a bit more ranting and raving but when the Supervisor said 'Book the 12' (Book 12 hours pay for the turn) calm was nearly always restored in an instant. The way to most senior driver's hearts in those days was through his wallet.

There was a separate Link for Secondmen at Mollington Street which was the term given to replace the word Fireman, as diesel traction was introduced. At Mollington Street there were 50 Secondmen in the Link. I am not entirely certain of that figure after the passing of many years but it will not be too far out. This Link was the 'Line of Promotion' from Secondman to 'Passed Secondman' (previously 'Passed Fireman') and then to Driver. The 'Line of Promotion' was safeguarded for secondmen. Only a secondman could eventually become a driver in those days and this was not to change on British Railways until the 'Trainman's Concept' was introduced by the British Railways Board and agreed by Trade Unions in 1988. There were some first class men from this link who went on to become drivers and to take other roles within the railway industry and do well for themselves, as did some drivers.

An amusing anecdotal story about this Link was that it was named the 'Ghost Link' by the depot boss who in my time at Mollington Street was Mr. Jack Barford, a wonderful man and a gentleman to all who knew him. I asked him one day why the Secondman's link was called the 'Ghost Link' and his reply was 'because some of those Secondmen in that Link can just disappear into thin air when they're in work never to be seen again'.

Even a gentleman was known to shout times. He originally came from Stoke. One of the drivers at Birkenhead said to Jack one day that the last time he saw a Stoke driver he was pulling around a brake van and a truck full of strawberries. This was a driver's way of being disparaging of work at other depots but it was always said in jest...at least, I think it was. His reply to the driver was quite direct, 'the reason why a Stoke man pulls a truck full of strawberries around the railway is so that a Birkenhead man can sit on his a\*\*e doing nothing all day sitting in the messroom scoffing them'. Even a gentleman was known to swear at times. What a Boss he was. It was he who set me on my way to numerous management positions within the railway industry some years later.

The work that we had at Mollington Street was regular but unspectacular. Drivers, guards and Secondmen worked to Etruria near Stoke and Croes Newydd at Wrexham with trains of iron ore from Birkenhead Docks for Shelton and Brymbo steelworks respectively. Northwich, Crewe, Preston/Preston Dock, Warrington,

Guide Bridge, Dewsnap Sidings and Godley Junction were all regular work locations for Birkenhead men. Shrewsbury was also a regular location to work to with the Aberystwyth tanks from Stanlow and also Whittington near Gobowen. Dee Marsh Curve Sidings (near Sealand) was also a location where we worked trains to Warrington and Godley Junction (for Wath).

The iron ore services from Bidston Dock to Shotwick sidings were worked by Birkenhead men after Bidston Shed closed in the early 1960s. There were five regular guards based at Bidston Dock (North Side) who worked the iron ore services with Birkenhead drivers. There were two brothers based at Bidston Dock, who were both guards and the best of them there, Ernie and Benny Griffiths, were excellent. These two men were a joy to work with. They were very efficient, reliable and knew exactly what they were doing. Apart from being the first class men that they were, they would also make out the driver's 'ticket' each time you worked with them. The driver's 'ticket' was in essence, a work sheet showing the duties performed during the shift, and who had relieved whom (and based at what depot) plus the locomotive/trains worked and any unusual occurrences outside the drivers diagrammed work. Ernie and Benny were the only two guards who did this, they were marvellous individuals and a credit to their grade.



**Class 40 number 40 180 at Birkenhead Mollington street on 11 October 1981. Photo by John Mahon.**

When the iron ore services finished in 1980 after the closure of Shotton Steelworks Ernie became a Chargeman at Birkenhead Park station and later his brother Benny became a Chargeman at Birkenhead Duke Street.

There was a driver based regularly at Duke Street on the 'Pilot' locomotive and his name was Bobby Smart. Bobby was so slow that you used to become tired just

watching him as he had had one pace, dead slow. We never could quite work out which was the slowest, Bobby or the 350hp shunting locomotive; it was a close run thing. If he did more than 3mph driving the locomotive he would get a nose bleed. He worked the three shifts at Birkenhead Duke Street which were 06:00 to 14:00, 14:00 to 22:00 and 22:00 to 06:00. He also occasionally worked the 0600 to 1400 Saturday morning shift, if he could get out of bed, that is. He was the only driver at Birkenhead who could oversleep on the 14:00 to 22:00 shift. Many was the time that one of the Duke Street shunting staff would go around to his house and wake him up at 13:45.

For all that, Bobby was a likeable fellow, and he would not upset anyone or harm a soul, just drive shunting staff 'up the wall' at his nice, steady and regular slow pace. Just the thing a shunter needs when it's pouring down with rain. He was an ASLEF member but one shunter said he should join the NUR instead, No Use Rushing.



**A class 03 locomotive number 03 162 at Duke Street Birkenhead on 10 November 1983. Photo by Kevin Smith**

I remember working with a guard who I will just call Guard BB, he is still about but he is no longer working within the railway industry, having left many years ago. This is probably just as well. These days we would probably describe him as being 'unhinged'. He was a total lunatic in his own way and as a driver you never quite knew what he was going to do, but then neither did he. At Stanlow Ground Frame there was a shunter nicknamed 'The Hogg' because he kept a smallholding of pigs and he smelt like one, too.

Guard BB didn't like 'The Hogg' much because of his aroma and he decided one day to have a bit of fun. We had just arrived at Stanlow Ground Frame with a light locomotive from Mollington Street and we were due to work to Preston Dock. Adjacent to my locomotive was a train of tanks about to depart for Haydock. In charge of that train was driver James J. Brooks (more about Jimmy in another article,

a comedian's comedian, hilarious). Guard BB attached the locomotive to our train and following a brake continuity test he proceeded to get the necessary paperwork from 'The Hogg'. He went into the cabin where 'The Hogg' was located and wearing a peg on his nose was given the train paperwork and driver's slip (which gave details of train weight, brake force available, length limit and speed - amongst other things and was to be handed to the train driver prior to departure). 'The Hogg' ignored this 'peg on the nose gesture' and Guard BB. departed the cabin to return to the locomotive, where I was waiting. 'Now driver', he said 'Once Brooksy has left we're next out'. 'Thank you', says I whereupon Guard BB poured me out a nice cup of tea whilst we waited. 'The Hogg' always wore a pair of green wellies when on duty, either having arrived from his small holding before taking duty or going there when his duty was completed. On this occasion he had taken them off and they were near his locker. Probably just to change his socks after a fortnight.



**Left: Class 25 locomotive number 25 060 at Mollington Street on 10 November 1983. Photo by Kevin Smith**

Driver Brooks duly propelled his train out from Stanlow onto the main line between Ellesmere Port and Helsby and after coming to a stand and then

receiving the signal to start from 'The Hogg' duly opened up his two Type 2 locomotives. They began to roar off, sounding like a thousand bomber raid over Berlin. He roared past me exchanging appropriate pleasantries by playing a tune only he knew on the leading locomotive horn. Then off he went towards Helsby to commence his journey to Haydock.

As the train sped past me with a load of 10 x 100 tanks I noticed on the rear drawbar hook of the last wagon in the train a pair of green wellies swinging around with great gusto. I was just about to speak to Guard BB about this when he promptly stood up in the driving cab of the locomotive opened the door on my side and shouted as loud as he could 'give it the wellie Jimmy...yahoo'. Very definitely 'unhinged'.

'The Hogg' had seen his wellies disappear past his cabin on the drawbar hook of the last wagon and contacted the Signalman at Stanlow & Thornton to stop the train to recover his wellies. This was done and the Chargeman at Stanlow & Thornton very shortly afterwards walked over to Stanlow & Thornton station and gave them to the driver of a Helsby to Rock Ferry DMU service who then promptly threw them over the chain-link fence as he was passing Stanlow Ground Frame. They were then reunited with their grateful owner. All of this was done in the space of about 20 minutes, what the passengers on the DMU made of all this was anybody's guess. *To be continued.* **Dennis Flood**



## A Career with the British Railways Construction Group – Eric Smith



*Eric Smith (third from left) with colleagues at Dent Head viaduct on a cold winter's night in 1992.*

Eric Smith has been in the 8D Association since its first full year of existence. Between March 1964 and March 1993 Eric worked for the British Rail construction group which was in the early days more often referred to as the London Midland Region DLO (Direct Labour Organisation). Eric had an interesting career working throughout the railway network on important items of infrastructure.

Eric was born on 18<sup>th</sup> July 1934. In September 1939 he started at Warrington Road Primary school. 'I remember starting school and the war breaking out' Eric explained and at its conclusion he started at Fairfield High School.

Eric was in the Boys Brigade at St Ambrose church in Widnes and in the first half of 1949 he flew to Denmark with them on a trip that was most unusual for those times. Eric travelled around Denmark by rail and he remembered all of the trains being steam hauled and the engines being very large.

Later in 1949 Eric went to work for Thomas Boulton & Sons whose plant was at Hutchinson Street in Widnes. Eric explained how 'I had wanted to be a brick layer but my Mother was not keen on this as a career choice as she had memories of family members who were in that trade being out of work in the 1930s. So my Grandad got me into Boulton's as an apprentice joiner'. At that time Eric didn't really have an interest in railways but he did assist Jim Manning with repairs to railway wagons that were owned by the company. 'A line led into the works and we had our own wagons.

All kinds of repairs were undertaken. The company had acid tank wagons and wooden sided open wagons' explained Eric.

Eric went into the Army in 1955 and served for two years with the 17<sup>th</sup> Gurkha Regiment in Malaya. After he had completed his service he returned to Boulton's where he remained until 1962.

'In 1962 I was earning only £12.00 per week and that included Saturday mornings. An opportunity came up at Irlam steelworks and the pay was £27.00 per week. I couldn't pass this up and went to work there. I travelled to Irlam by train from Farnworth station (Widnes North). Although the trains were quite fast there was a problem that made my working day very long. To get to Irlam for the time I needed to I had to get a stopping train to Warrington Central. It terminated there and then went back to Liverpool. I then had to wait for a long time at Warrington, nearly an hour in fact, for a Manchester Central to Warrington Central train to arrive. I then travelled on that train to Irlam. The same happened in the return direction' explained Eric.

Eric worked at the steelworks for only three months and then he heard about an opportunity with the Widnes Borough Council. The job was in their DLO working as a joiner. Eric had an interview for the job on a Friday and started the following Monday. He was involved in the building of council houses at Hough Green and at Halton View. Eric explained how 'the Council job was a good one with sociable hours but the pay was poor. In March 1964 I met a former colleague of mine Dave Richards in Widnes town centre. We got talking and I explained what I had been doing. Dave told me about jobs that were going on the railway. A person called Sid Davenport was looking for joiners. Now at the council we worked as pairs and I wanted my mate to come with me. So I contacted Sid Davenport and asked about the job. He was very keen to take me on. I asked about my mate and he agreed to take him too. So I started working for British Rail'.

Eric's first job was at Keckwick. He worked on the bridge that carried the former Birkenhead Joint Railway over the former Grand Junction Railway. In the early days he also worked at Crewe, where he remembers seeing the locomotive that had been involved in the Great Train Robbery, and on bridges along the lines that were being electrified at that time.



**Left: The bridge at Wallasey Village that Eric Smith worked on in 1965. Photo by Rebecca Hicks**

In 1965 Eric was involved in the construction of a new bridge at Wallasey Village station. The bridge carried the railway over Leasowe Road which had been made into a dual carriageway. Eric had to travel to Wallasey

each day. He travelled by train from Widnes North to Liverpool Central where he transferred to the Mersey Railway for a train to Wallasey Village. The bridge was a single steel span supported in the centre of the road by concrete pillars. At the top of the pillars the year in which the bridge was installed was set into the concrete. Eric had the task of placing the year section into the structure. Whilst completing the task he placed a copy of a daily newspaper behind the date stone. It is probably there to this very day. Eric was present when the scrap merchant came along to collect the steelwork from the original bridge. He recognised the scrap merchant straight away explaining how 'it was Vince Karalius the well-known Widnes Rugby League player. It wasn't that long after their Wembley victory in 1964 so I knew who he was straight away. That man had huge hands. I have never seen hands like them'.



***Left: The 1965 date marker on the bridge at Wallasey Village station that was fitted by Eric Smith. Photo by Rebecca Hicks***

Another thing that Eric remembered from the bridge job at Wallasey Village was the finding of bones in the embankment during the construction works. Workers on the site thought they had unearthed human remains and the police were summoned. 'They taped off the embankment and treated it as a murder scene but in the end the

bones turned out to be those of a donkey. It must have been buried in the embankment when the line was built' explained Eric.

Eric then went on to work on the aqueduct that carried the Bridgewater canal over the former Grand Junction Line at Preston Brook. The original aqueduct had been built in 1836/7 and it did not have the clearances needed for electrification. It therefore had to be replaced. Eric explained how the original structure was blown up by dynamite. 'This was the usual way of demolishing bridges back then' said Eric. He then took place in the construction of its replacement.

Eric carried out work on many locomotive sheds and depots including those at Allerton, Birkenhead Mollington Street and Birkenhead North. He worked on cranes at the former and also as far away as York. Much of the work was to do with the end of steam and included the installation of diesel fuelling points at depots. A number of depots also had doors fitted to their sheds at this time and Eric explained how 'one time at Chester depot we installed the framework for a set of doors. Depot staff all over were starting to insist upon doors to keep out the elements. Anyway what I recall about Chester is no sooner had one set of doors been installed than a locomotive was driven right through them when they were in the closed position'.

In the late 1970s Eric worked on a bridge at Lea Green. 'It was by the original station there the house of which was still standing at that time. While I was there Sid Davenport approached me and asked if I would step up to foreman. He had been promoted and he wanted me to step up into his position. I didn't really want to and told him so. He told me that if I didn't the men would have to be laid off. It was a

piece of blackmail typical of those times and I agreed to take on the position which made me a Foreman Joiner’.



**Left: Lea Green seen from the bridge on which Eric worked in 1980.  
Photo by Bevan Price**

Whilst at Lea Green Eric witnessed the preparations for the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Liverpool & Manchester Railway. 'I remember Tommy Carson's gang putting up the stands next to the line' he said.

Eric explained how he 'worked on the roof of the former London & North Western Hotel at Liverpool Lime Street. It was an amazing building that had something like 630 rooms. We were involved in repairing the slate roof and putting in handrails. The building had originally had a grand staircase which was still there but boarded up. One time when we were high up in the building one of the gang said to me that he would go out for a walk around Liverpool at lunch time. When we stopped for lunch he set off. He didn't return for hours and when he did he explained that he had never made it out of the building. He had got lost in the maze of corridors. As you can imagine we found this very funny'.

During his career Eric worked on many tunnels. The most interesting from Eric's point of view was the Mersey Railway tunnel. Eric explained that 'there are deep shafts on each side of the river at Birkenhead and Liverpool. The shafts are associated with the drainage and they link to a drainage tunnel which is deeper than the running line tunnel. My team had to install a gate down there. There had been a visit by the children's television show Blue Peter and somebody had pointed out that there was a dangerous opening that led into the drainage tunnel. We were also involved in lifting Sulzer pumping engines out of those shafts. It was very interesting.

At one time water pumped out of that tunnel went to the Echo building to cool machinery. It was then hot so passed to an insurance building to provide heating. Finally it went back out into the river'. At Shore Road in Birkenhead there had been a steam pumping engine for the Mersey Railway and Eric worked on the roof of the building that housed it. He also worked at Hamilton Square station on the tower that had originally contained the lift operating machinery. 'That was a job' said Eric. 'Widows at the top of the tower had become broken and pigeons had got in. there was 3ft of pigeon droppings in the tower. We fixed the windows so that the pigeons couldn't get in'.

Eric also worked on a number of stations. His team built a number of timber stations that were intended to be easily removed if they proved to be un-remunerative. He worked at Rhyl station on a lift shaft and installed a telephone exchange at Llandudno Junction.

In the late 1980s Eric's team was involved in a number of enabling work projects for the Manchester Metrolink system.

The story of how in the 1980s British Rail had wanted to close the Settle and Carlisle line is well known as is the story of the battle to save it. Infrastructure along the line had been neglected by British Rail and allowed to get into a poor condition and after closure had been refused they had to carry out urgent repairs.



**Left: The Ribbleshead Viaduct on which Eric worked in the early 1990s seen from the 'Mersey Fellsman' rail tour on 12<sup>th</sup> June 2010. Photo by Paul Wright**

Eric and his team were drafted in to take part in the works. He was involved in works on the famous Ribbleshead and the Dent head viaducts. 'We worked on those viaducts during the winter of 1992/3 and it was absolutely freezing up there' said Eric. On one Saturday night in November 1992 Eric was on the Dent Head viaduct during a blizzard that was one of the worst in years. A local newspaper covered the event and told the story of how the men had worked on through the blizzard to ensure the work was completed. There had been a two week closure so the

viaduct could be waterproofed and other works carried out. It had to be completed by a set time so the line could reopen. The newspaper article contained a quote from

one of the men that said 'working here is something to tell your grandchildren about' a comment that certainly rings true of such a job in such appalling conditions. On 16<sup>th</sup> December 1992 a Mr D A Hutchins the Construction Assistant on the project wrote to Eric and congratulated him and his men for a job well done.



**Left: The letter that Eric received at the end of his career on the railway in 1993.**

Sadly though as the Dent Head job was coming to an end the team was informed that it was to be disbanded. This was in the run up to privatisation of British Rail. The ideology of the time was very much against DLOs and there was a drive towards the use of contractors. The British Rail London Midland Region DLO had once been the sixth largest civil engineering employer in the country but by 1992 it employed only 260 workers and 21 management and technical staff. It could trace its origins back to 1912 when

the London & North Western Railway had formed its own works organisation after a contractor had become bankrupt. But none of this counted for anything in late 1992.

At 58 years of age Eric had no desire to work for another company so he took redundancy and finished in March 1993 having completed 29 years of loyal service. He was one of the longest serving employees within the organisation.

The move to using only contractors on the railway proved to be a mistake and led to the crash at Hatfield. There was then a move to a mixed economy of internal employees and external contractors and that remains the case in 2015 within Network Rail. Eric was asked to go back a couple of times after he had finished but never had the desire to.

Eric is a regular at 8D events and a mine of information about the railway infrastructure of the local area. By **Paul Wright**

**From the Archive**



*Seen passing through the remains of Birkenhead Town station on 5 March 1967 is Fairburn 4MT 2-6-4T locomotive number 42616. The engine was on its way to Birkenhead Mollington Street shed having worked a train into Birkenhead Woodside station. Photo by Richard Mercer*



*The demise of the former St Helens & Runcorn Gap Railway at Farnworth seen on 31<sup>st</sup> January 1982. The line had closed the previous November. Photo by Graham Earle*

## Events Programme

**19.00 – Thursday 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2015 – Railway Social Evening and Quiz Night** - A chance to chat to fellow members and to test your railway knowledge. There will be a bar. **Select Security Stadium, Lowerhouse Lane, Widnes.**

**10.00 – Saturday 16<sup>th</sup> January 2016 – The Four-Masted Full-Rigged Ship *Liverpool*** - The age of the sailing ship overlapped the introduction of steam ships by approximately a century. The Liverpool was one of the later sailing vessels designed and built to remain competitive with the increasingly-economical steamers well into the 20th century. An illustrated talk by David White. **Select Security Stadium, Lowerhouse Lane, Widnes.**

**10.00 – Saturday 24<sup>rd</sup> January 2016 – The 8D Association AGM** – The Annual General Meeting of the association followed by a guest speaker and a buffet. **Select Security Stadium, Lowerhouse Lane, Widnes.**

**19.00 – Thursday 18<sup>th</sup> February 2016 – Vulcan Works versus The Somerset & Dorset Railway** – An illustrated talk about a legal battle between two well-known railway institutions by Tony Foster. **Select Security Stadium, Lowerhouse Lane, Widnes.**



'Where is this' competition? (Answers to [pwright964@btinternet.com](mailto:pwright964@btinternet.com)) Photo by John Philips. The September competition was correctly guessed by Rod Dixon, Colin Greenall and Arthur Turner. The location was the goods yard at St Helens Shaw Street.

***Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year***

***To You All***

NEXT JOURNAL PUBLISHED 1 March 2016