

# ON SHED

## The Journal of the 8D Association

Volume 7 Number 2 – June 2017



### WIDNES NUMBER 1

On Sunday 13<sup>th</sup> May 1979 the diverted 08:50 Liverpool Lime Street to Newcastle service is seen drawing away from Widnes Number 1 signal box. At the head of the train is Brush class 47 locomotive number 47 536. Since December 1973 Widnes Number 1 box had controlled the southern end of the single line section that ran as far as Sutton Oak Junction. **Photo by Brian Roberts**

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## Volume 7 Number 2

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### Editor



*Left: Looking north from Gateacre station in the early 1960s. An unidentified Brush Type 2 locomotive is seen heading south towards the CLC main line at Halewood. Photo by Brian Roberts*

Once again the front cover features a view of the St Helens & Runcorn gap Railway. It's also another photo by Brian Roberts who has recently joined the 8D Association.

I make no apology for showing yet another view of the St. Helens line and such is the quality of Brian's work it deserves to be seen in print. There was a time when lines such as this were thought to have been little photographed, but recently collections have started to be donated to the association, and in them there are some real gems. All of them need to be seen and that is why we are starting to put them online, either on the main website or on our new Flickr archive page.

It is vital that the photographic record of our local railways is not lost, and I would urge any member who has, or knows of a collection, to consider making it available so that it can be seen by fellow enthusiasts.

The summer is upon us and we have already had some very good site visits. Those who attended the visits to the Mersey Gateway bridge seemed very pleased with the experience. **Paul Wright**



*Members of the 8D Association observe the construction of the Mersey Gateway bridge on 11<sup>th</sup> April 2017. The 8D group are standing on the temporary bridge which spans the River Mersey between Widnes and Runcorn. The temporary bridge was built to assist with the construction of the Mersey Gateway bridge. It will be removed in 2018. Photo by Paul Wright*

### **8D Association Visit to Mersey Gateway Bridge**

The 8D association has been very fortunate as we were granted access to the Mersey Gateway bridge construction site at the River Mersey on the 11<sup>th</sup> April and 18<sup>th</sup> May 2017.

Members were taken onto site and allowed to walk from Widnes to Runcorn over the temporary bridge which has been constructed to assist in the building of the Mersey Gateway cable stay bridge. Although a road bridge, the bridge was of great interest to 8D members, as it is a fascinating civil engineering project. It is in fact the largest civil engineering project outside of London, and the largest that is being undertaken by a single local authority (in this case Halton Borough Council through the Mersey Gateway Crossing Board). Thanks must go to Elaine Newall and Paul Oldfield of the Crossing Board for arranging the visits.

### **New Members**

Welcome to our latest members **Brian Roberts, Malcolm Owen, John Bridson, Phil Gorton, David Borshik, David Sheridan, Karen Wright and Martin White.**

**Wall collapse in Edge Hill – Lime Street Cutting**



At 17.40 on the evening of Tuesday 28th of February, a major incident took place which subsequently caused the closure of Liverpool Lime Street station for seven days.

A retaining wall located on top of the cutting between Lime Street and Edge Hill gave way, causing it to collapse on to the railway line, bringing with it 200 tons of earth, rubble, palisade fencing and several containers. In doing so, it also brought down the overhead wires. Fortunately, there were no injuries but the passengers on the Class 319 unit forming 1F91 the 16.40 Manchester Airport to Liverpool Lime Street service had a narrow escape, as the driver applied the emergency brakes to avoid hitting the debris, after he had seen the signal change back to red in front of him. The passengers from this service, were eventually detrained using ladders and were walked back to Edge Hill station, where buses took

them into Liverpool.

The collapse trapped several trains in the station resulting in lots of cancelled services. A contingency plan was drawn up as it was realised that the station would be closed for several days.

Whilst Lime Street was out of action Northern electric trains terminated and departed from Huyton, with buses providing a link to the city centre. Trans Pennine Express turned around the Scarborough service at Liverpool South Parkway, while the Newcastle between Liverpool and Manchester Victoria did not run at all. East Midlands Trains terminated the Norwich service at Manchester Oxford Road, with passengers for Liverpool using the Northern service along the CLC, which initially was terminated at Hunts Cross for onward connections via Merseyrail electrics to Liverpool Central. However two days after the incident the CLC local service was extended to terminate at Edge Hill. This was because Merseyrail decided to terminate the Southport service at Liverpool South Parkway due to overcrowding at the station, which caused late running of their trains. Liverpool South Parkway to Hunts Cross electric service was replaced by a bus. Virgin Trains used Runcorn as the terminating and departure station for the London service. Coaches were provided to ferry passengers to Liverpool, while the Pendolinos ran to Ditton Yard to stable between trips. In contrast, London Midland's Birmingham service ran to and from Liverpool South Parkway.

Repairs took a week to complete, and services recommenced using the station on the evening of March 7th, the first train being a London Midland Class 350 unit on a service from Birmingham New Street.

On a visit to Lime Street the previous day, 2 Class 319 units, 2 Class 158 units, 156.459 and 390.010 were stabled in the station. The 156 had its engines running while the Pendolino had a "not to be moved" sign on it. It is believed that Virgin charged Network Rail £20,000 per day for the time that it was stuck in the station.

## **Rail Tours**



**Left: The Waste Train rail tour at Kirkby on 11<sup>th</sup> March 2017. Photo by John Mahon**

On Saturday 11th of March 2017 DB Cargo UK locos 66 002 and 66 125 top and tailed Pathfinder Tours *The Waste Train* from Didcot Parkway to Knowsley freight terminal in Kirkby. The return journey to Didcot passed

through Warrington Bank Quay, and visited the Bredbury Stone Terminal before returning via Crewe and the West Midlands to Didcot.

On Saturday 8th of April 2017 the Belmond Orient Express rake of Pullman Cars made its annual regular run from London Victoria to Runcorn, carrying Race Goers to the Grand National Race Meeting at Aintree. Motive Power was provided by DB Cargo UK's Royal train Class 67's 67 005 and 67 006 which top and tailed the train. The empty stock was serviced at Crewe after going to Ditton Yard to reverse. The empty stock then returned to Liverpool Lime Street in the evening to collect the race goers for their return to London Victoria. For the first time in a number of years East Midlands Trains did not enhance the capacity of two return services from Nottingham to Liverpool, on which they had previously run 7 Car Meridian sets, replacing the normal Class 158 units.

On Saturday 22nd of April 2017, Belmond's sister train 'The Northern Bell' was involved on an unusual excursion train from Chester to Harrogate, which twice traversed the Halton Curve and passed through Runcorn station three times during the course of its journey. The empty stock was worked to Chester from its new base on the Severn Valley Railway at Kidderminster. Upon departure from Chester, the train was routed via Frodsham Junction, Halton Junction, Runcorn, Liverpool Lime Street where it reversed, and then went back through Runcorn to Crewe where another reversal took place, before setting off for Harrogate via Stockport, Stalybridge, Huddersfield, Castleford, York and Knaresborough arriving in Harrogate at Lunchtime. The empty stock was serviced at Neville Hill depot in Leeds and on the return journey the train followed the outward route except for the section between



Liverpool Lime Street and Chester, which was via Earlestown and Warrington Bank Quay rather than via Runcorn. The train was top and tailed throughout by DRS Class 68 diesels.

### **Mother's Day Train**



**Left: The Mother's day special seen on the Halton Curve at Beechwood, Runcorn on 26<sup>th</sup> March 2017. Photo by Doug Birmingham**

DRS Class 68's were used on the Belmond Northern Belle 'Mother's Day Luncheon Special' which ran on Sunday 26th of March. The train's journey from Crewe to Carlisle was via Chester (Reverse) Frodsham Junction, Halton Junction and Runcorn to Liverpool Lime Street, where it reversed before proceeding to Carlisle via Rainhill, Newton-Le-Willows, Parkside West Junction, Golborne Junction and the West Coast Main Line. The return run was back down the West Coast Main Line to Warrington Bank Quay, then via Frodsham Junction to Chester where, after yet another reversal, the train traversed the Halton Curve a second time on its way back to Liverpool Lime

Street where it terminated. The empty stock then departed for the Severn Valley Railway at Kidderminster, which is the new home base for the Northern Belle carriages until 2027.

### **Test Running of class 88**

Commencing on Monday 27th of March 2017 a DRS Class 88 electro diesel started test running on the West Coast Main Line. Locomotive 88 002 *Prometheus* was observed by at least two 8D Association members, on the 28th March at Warrington Bank Quay and on the 30<sup>th</sup> March at Huyton. The engine worked a diagram that covered an outward journey starting at 07.04 from Carlisle Kingmoor depot to Crewe. From Crewe the locomotive departed at 11.04 for the journey back to Carlisle via Warrington Bank Quay, Earlestown and Edge Hill (where it reversed). The journey

then continued via Huyton, St Helens Central, Wigan North Western and back down the West Coast Main Line.

### **The Evening Lark Rail Tour**

On Friday the 31st of March 2017 DRS power was again used for a passenger train working when Class 37's 37 716 and 37 069 top and tailed Pathfinder tours 'The Evening Lark' rail tour from Derby to Crewe. The tour included a visit to Hooton where it reversed and took the former BJR route through Ellesmere Port to Helsby. The tour then ran via Frodsham Junction and Halton Junction to Liverpool Lime Street. After another reversal the train ran non-stop over the ex-CLC route through Widnes and Warrington Central to Manchester Oxford Road. The train was scheduled to return to Crewe via the Styal line but due to a point's failure it ran via Stockport.

### **New Bridge for Widnes Deviation Line**



***The new bridge over the Widnes deviation line was taking shape when this view was taken on 12<sup>th</sup> May 2017. The bridge is part of the Mersey Gateway scheme and it is the only overbridge on the deviation line (the bridges that form part of the Silver Jubilee Bridge route being located at a point that was part of the original 1852 Warrington & Garston line). Photo courtesy of Merseylink***

Concrete sections were lifted into place over the Widnes deviation line just to the west of the Victoria Road bridge during May. The sections will form a new bridge over the line that will carry the northern approach road to the Mersey Gateway bridge which is due to open in the Autumn of 2017. Very little traffic is currently using the line so the construction of the bridge has not caused much disruption. The new bridge is the only overbridge on the 1869 deviation line.

## Memories of Birkenhead Mollington Street Motive Power Depot Part 4 - by Denis Flood



*A Birkenhead North to Hall Road TMD working is seen at Halton Junction on 14 June 1973. The train, which was being hauled by Sulzer Type 2 locomotive D5256, consisted of class 502 EMUs that had been serviced at Birkenhead North. They were being returned to their home depot. Photo by David Lennon*

I mentioned at the end of Part 3 of these articles, the tank train service from Stanlow to Whittington (between Gobowen and Shrewsbury), and the interesting operational procedure which was undertaken to berth the loaded train and then remove the empty tank train from Whittington for return to Stanlow.

The time taken to carry out this work, involving train work and shunting, was normally about seven hours and we were never more than 50 miles away from Stanlow at any one time. In those days, we worked an eight-hour day, and for the Whittington job we booked on at 13:00 and booked off at 21:00. If everything went well during the day, then it was always quite straightforward to arrive back with the locomotive at Mollington Street, at about 20:00.

However, there were times when several drivers arrived back at Mollington Street later than 21:00. These individuals were always intent on making overtime, and because of their actions the job was `split` between Birkenhead men and Croes Newydd (Wrexham) men, in the mid-1970s.

Birkenhead men would be relieved at Wrexham South Fork Junction by Croes Newydd men, who then worked the train forward to Stanlow. The Birkenhead men then travelled back `on the cushions` as passengers on a service train via Chester.

This situation was clearly uneconomical and did not last very long.



As a result of a change in provision of fuel trains from Stanlow to Whittington, the work was eventually lost completely to both depots in the late 1970s.

Whittington Depot was then supplied with fuel trains from the BP refinery at Llandarcy near Swansea, until the early 1980s when the traffic ceased completely. Even BP Llandarcy has now closed. It is indeed ironic that I ended up working in Swansea in a railway management position between 1982 and 1984, and I was involved with BP Llandarcy during that time. How ironic!

There is no doubt that Stanlow would have ultimately ceased providing fuel trains for Whittington, as a programme of pipeline networks was starting to get underway, but I remain convinced that the greed of a few drivers at Mollington Street, in making overtime on this particular job, hastened the end of this traffic from Stanlow to Whittington earlier than it should have done.

Now back to a remarkable `character` at Mollington Street.....

There was a guard called Les Thompson, a jovial West Indian, who worked at Mollington Street and what he got himself involved in at times was nothing short of hilarious, absurd, and at times totally incompetent!

However, it takes `two to tango`, and in the case of this particular incident, it was three.

There was one occasion when he was working a train back from Grange Sidings, near Stoke-on-Trent, to Dee Marsh with a Birkenhead driver, and he became involved in something which could be expected to be seen only in a Will Hay film!

Upon arrival of the train at Middlewich, on the single line between Sandbach and Northwich Sandbach Junction, the train was signalled into the down Middlewich `loop`, whilst another was on the way from Northwich Sandbach Junction, that was required to pass.

The driver stopped his train at the down `loop` starting signal, and waited for the `up` train to pass.

The Method of Working between Northwich Sandbach Junction and Middlewich was by a signalling system known as `Electric Token` working.

This required a driver to obtain a `Token` via an electro-mechanical token instrument (magazine). This was a metal key with the line nomenclature to which it applied stamped on it and in the case of this particular single line of railway it would read `Middlewich to Northwich`.

The `Token` was normally handed to a driver by the controlling signalman before being allowed to pass over the portion of line concerned, if it was clear of trains. However, as the driver had drawn his train forward over the down `loop` to the starting signal he would need to remove a `Token` from the auxiliary token instrument (magazine). This was located near to the starting signal and the token would be taken when required prior to departing towards Northwich Sandbach Junction.



**Looking north at Middlewich in the summer of 1972. This was the scene of the comedy of errors that resulted in Birkenhead Mollington Street guard Les Thompson being separated from his train. Photo by Bill Jamieson**

It was important for the driver to make sure his train was drawn 'in clear' upon arrival in the down 'loop' to allow another train to pass on the 'up' line. This was done and the auxiliary token instrument (magazine) was located where it was for just such circumstances.

Whilst waiting for the 'up' train to pass, it was a service from the Shellstar plant near Helsby West Cheshire Junction, to Carmarthen, Les decided to alight from his brake van and make a 'brew' in Middlewich signal box...so far, so good!

Whilst Les was in the signal box, the 'up' train then arrived at Middlewich and the driver handed in the 'Token' for the portion of line between Northwich Sandbach Junction and Middlewich.

He then continued on his way towards Sandbach and the single line between these two points was now clear. The signalman at Middlewich now rang the driver, who was waiting by the auxiliary token instrument (magazine) and authorised him to remove a 'Token' for the Middlewich to Northwich Sandbach Junction section. The driver did this and returned to his locomotive and this is where the first mistake was made – the Middlewich signalman cleared the 'down' loop section signal and down line starting signal for the train to proceed – with guard Les Thompson still in the signal box! All was not lost though, because the driver was required to exchange hand signals with his guard prior to departure from Middlewich, after taking possession of the 'Token' from the auxiliary token instrument (magazine).

This is where mistake number two was made...

The driver failed to do this and drew forward slowly – Les thought he was dropping the train down so that his brake van would be opposite the signal box to allow him to rejoin it – the driver was drawing his train out of the down ‘loop’ slowly to observe the 15mph permanent speed restriction from the ‘loop’ and onto the down & up branch line. Les left the signal box with his can of tea, all his other possessions being inside the brake van – including his lamp – and stood by the now rapidly moving train, ready to get back into his brake van.

It was clear to Les that he wasn’t going to get back into his brake van because of the increasing speed of the train so he just stood back and watched – sipping his nice cup of tea. The brake van went rattling past him – the driver had clearly not exchanged hand signals with Les prior to departure and was now on his way towards Northwich Sandbach Junction, blissfully unaware that he had left his guard behind at Middlewich!

It was late evening when this happened and the Middlewich signalman assumed that Les had rejoined his brake van and when he saw the tail lamps of the brake van pass his down section signal, he duly replaced the signal to ‘danger’ and he then sat down himself to enjoy his own cup of tea. At this point Les walked into the signal box and said something quite blasphemous about the driver...and the signalman quickly realised his driver had left him behind – oh, dear!



**Left: Middlewich signal box seen in the late 1960s. Photo from the David Ingram Collection**

Had he waited to clear his signals on the down ‘loop’ line and the down & up branch line, after Les had walked back to re-join his brake van, then this fiasco would not have

happened. Even so after clearing the signals for the driver, had the driver himself exchanged hand signals with his guard prior to departure then this event would have not occurred.

It takes two to tango, does it not? Or can it be three?

The Middlewich signalman could only advise the signalman at Northwich Sandbach Junction signal box to advise the driver upon arrival there that he had left his guard behind at Middlewich. He was now thinking what to do for the best before having to report this fiasco to the Regional Control Office at Crewe.

Oh, dear! Now comes the third person to tango in this matter – which was guard Les Thompson himself...

Whilst the Middlewich signalman was eventually reporting this matter to the Regional Control Office at Crewe, Les decided to take matters into his own hands – or should I say his feet!

He left the signal box, without the Middlewich signalman having noticed his departure, and decided to WALK from there to Northwich – a distance of some four and a half miles – in total darkness...and with no hand lamp to guide his way!

It can only be imagined what the Middlewich signalman was thinking when he realised Les was no longer in the signal box...He shouted from his signal box window, when he saw a ghostly figure disappearing into the darkness, to come back – and just heard a muted voice saying `I'm walking to Northwich, to have a word with that bloody driver`!

I think it is safe to say that was the polite version of events, as related by the Middlewich signalman afterwards...

What a fiasco this now was – both the driver and signalman having made mistakes, which had either been more observant, would not have happened – and now the guard of the train decided, on his own responsibility, to WALK from Middlewich to Northwich... Will Hay eat your heart out!

When the train eventually arrived at Northwich Sandbach Junction the driver entered the auxiliary token instrument hut there to replace the `Token`...and was told by the signalman that he had left his guard behind at Middlewich. Oh, dear. Furthermore, his guard was last seen walking from Middlewich to Northwich – in total darkness. Oh, dear!

The driver knew he had made a serious mistake in not exchanging hand signals with his guard – he now had plenty of time to think of an excuse to tell Mr.Jack Barford, Assistant Area Manager (Train Crews), when he eventually arrived back at Birkenhead Mollington Street...

Meanwhile, back at Middlewich, a permanent way gang vehicle driver was summoned to drive along the route, by road, to see if he could see any sign of Les Thompson. He wasn't successful.

Any driver who has worked over the line between Northwich and Middlewich, I did many times, will tell you that the route is `black`...in other words, there is very little visibility of local landmarks to focus on – it was no surprise that the permanent way man couldn't find Les...since most of this route does not follow the contour of the road.

It can only be imagined what he was thinking when he accessed the line by various access points and was shouting "Guard, where are you"...in the darkness!

The driver, who I have not named as he is, thankfully, still alive to this day, was left awaiting developments at Northwich Sandbach Junction, as was the signalman there and at Middlewich – not to mention the permanent way man, now likely suffering from a hoarse voice from all that shouting...



In the meantime, unaware of the further problems he had caused in this fiasco, Les was busy tripping over foliage and ballast stone on his railway hike between Middlewich and Northwich...and using his box of Swan Vestas matches at a rapid rate to light up his way as he went.

After some two and a half hours of walking, tripping and cursing, the gallant Les arrived at Northwich Sandbach Junction and stood at the side of the locomotive (a Type 2 diesel) and banged as hard as he could on the bottom of the door to wake the driver up. The driver woke up with a start and opened the window...and there was the gallant Les, who immediately said to him "Man, ma boots sure is hot!!".

A hilarious comment under the circumstances!

The upshot of this fiasco was that all three individuals involved, the driver, the Middlewich signalman and the intrepid guard, Les Thompson, were given `suitable conversations` about what they should and should not have done. Mr. Jack Barford, our first class boss at Birkenhead, said he would `dine out` on this comedy of errors for years. I can assure the reader that we who had the good fortune to work at Birkenhead Mollington Street have been doing just that for a good many years.

Another of Les`s fiascos involved the fuel depot at Haydock, in Lancashire...and what a fiasco that one turned out to be – this one caused a full scale emergency to be declared.



**Left: Ashton in Makerfield station looking east on 16 September 1979. The station was located on the GCR Lowton St Mary – St Helens Central line and the 14:26 Stanlow to Haydock tank train would have passed through on its way to the fuel depot. Photo by Philip Hodkinson**

We had a job at Birkenhead, in which we would work a tank train from Stanlow to Haydock at 14:26,

each weekday. This train was normally routed via Warrington, Earlestown, St.Helens Junction, St.Helens Shaw Street (as it was known then), Garswood and Bamfurlong Junction. The train could then access the Haydock Branch Junction from the up slow line near Golborne Junction. This route did not require us to `run round`.

An alternative route for this service was via Warrington, Winwick Junction, Golborne Junction, Bamfurlong Junction and then Wigan Springs Branch, where the train would `run round` via the up and down goods lines at Springs Branch and then, via the up slow line, to Haydock Branch Junction for Haydock.

If this train was routed via Warrington and St. Helens Junction then it was occasionally rostered with 2 x Type 4 locomotives (Class 40s), if 2 x Type 2s (Class 25s) were not available.

This was the only diagrammed turn I ever worked with 2 x Type 4 (Class 40) locomotives – they would certainly make a racket on the climb up to Garswood from Carr Mill Dam...they could probably be heard in St. Helens Town Centre.

Les worked this job one day with a driver who was an ex Stafford man, and he was a `character` in his own way...

He had an imagination which would rival, and better, any `tall story` told by any driver at Birkenhead – and anywhere else!

There were only two discharging roads at Haydock and one had to be clear before a loaded train could be berthed – Preston men worked a tank train from Heysham to Haydock and were usually leaving just prior to the arrival of the 14:26 service from Stanlow.

This train would be held on the up slow line at Haydock Branch Junction whilst the departing Heysham service accessed the down slow line there, and continued on towards Bamfurlong Junction.

The move at Haydock involved drawing forward on the few hundred yards of what remained of the former line to the original St. Helens Central station, and then `setting back` to berth the train of 10 x 100 tonne tank vehicles inside the fuel discharge compound.

The guard was required to correctly berth the train with the wagon fuel discharge valves directly opposite the fixed position depot fuel discharge pipes. Les and the driver did this and the train was secured. The locomotive was always detached and stabled outside the compound – it was never left inside the compound still attached to the train.

It took about four hours to fully assemble the fuel discharge pipes to the vehicles, discharge the fuel into the depot holding tanks, and then remove the pipes from the vehicles ready for return journey to Stanlow.

This work was always carried out by Haydock Depot staff, and whilst this was taking place, both the driver and guard would be allowed to use the subsidised canteen on the site, which was provided for road tanker drivers use, and enjoy a nice cooked meal in a tin foil tray, for the princely sum of 10p, in the early 1970s.

I still find what happened with these two at Haydock, after all the years which have since passed, to be a combination of Fred Carno`s railway and total lunacy. It is difficult to appreciate just what came first!

The train which they both worked to Haydock had been fully discharged on No.2 siding, with the pipework fully removed and secured...or so they had believed. It was thus ready to move out of the terminal and be returned to Stanlow.

However the Preston men had arrived whilst they were having their break and had



**Left: Sutton oak through which the Stanlow to Haydock trains were usually routed seen on 11 May 1984. Photo by Doug Birmingham**

secured a loaded train of another 10 x 100 tonne tank wagons on No.1 siding – and the returned `light engine` to Wigan Springs Branch depot to await the train being

discharged.

For some reason, we didn't see too many Springs Branch men in the subsidised canteen at Haydock – maybe it was the cost of the 10p meals which put them off!

There were now two trains within the Haydock compound and both the driver and Les were told by the Haydock Depot staff that their train was ready to move. They both left the canteen and walked outside – the driver having walked around the security fence to access his locomotive, away from the berthed train, and Les chose to walk through the compound, which was usual for the train guard.

However, all was not what it appeared in the compound that day...

The Haydock depot staff thought that the driver and Les were the Preston men...

and as there had been a shift changeover involving Haydock depot staff after they had berthed their own train from Stanlow, the scene was now set for a fiasco of the highest order – which should never have happened at all.

Haydock depot staff had discharged the Heysham tank train first because it was required to leave in road tankers as soon as this was completed...and work had not yet started on the train from Stanlow – which contained heavy duty fuel oil.

The Birkenhead driver had by now started the engine of his locomotive and was waiting instructions from Les – but the driver was sat in the wrong driving cab. He should have been sat in the leading driving cab so that he could drive the locomotive directly onto the waiting vehicles – had he done this then he would have been aware of one obvious thing – that the fuel pipes were still attached to the tank vehicles...and discharging was underway!

To make matters even worse than this, Les had actually stepped over twenty discharge pipes (two to each vehicle) as he walked towards the locomotive, outside the compound...For reasons only he could ever understand, he failed to appreciate the real significance of this.

He signalled the driver to move his locomotive towards the compound to attach it to the vehicles which were being discharged – and with the driver in the wrong driving cab the scene was set for the finest fiasco ever seen at Haydock.

The locomotive was coupled up to the train – and then Les signalled the driver to move the locomotive forward to commence the shunting move – and as he did so most of the fuel pipes were pulled off the berthed vehicles – resulting in a very large heavy fuel spillage at Haydock...oh, dear!

The entire fuel discharging site had to be covered with foam by the fire emergency team at Haydock...it can only be imagined what bill was presented to BR after this fiasco!

Neither Les or the driver were dismissed from railway service as a result of this incident. They were very fortunate indeed...

I mentioned in an earlier article that upon the arrival of Edge Hill men at Birkenhead, the route knowledge there became expansive and it included the Carlisle route – which meant that the Hooton to Bathgate car train could be worked to Carlisle by Birkenhead men, albeit by those who had transferred to Birkenhead from Edge Hill.

Les had another `glorious` occasion when working one of these trains with a former Edge Hill man, driver John Kay, who was a first class railwayman.

Relief was affected at Carlisle No.12 signal box on this particular job by Carlisle or Polmadie men – and Les had fallen asleep in the rear cab of the Brush Sulzer Type 4 locomotive which driver Kay had worked to Carlisle...and this was an occasion when they were relieved by Polmadie men. The Polmadie guard could not wake Les up so he ended up in Mossend Yard, near Glasgow!

This was much to the amusement of driver Kay...but not to the long-suffering Mr Jack Barford, our boss at Mollington Street.

I had my day with Les, as all drivers at Birkenhead inevitably did, and it involved us working a train of Class 502 EMU ECS from Birkenhead North TMD to Hall Road Carriage Shed, situated between Liverpool and Southport.

This was a very interesting journey – I always enjoyed working this train, It was routed via the former GCR line through Heswall Hills and down to Dee Marsh. From there we took the GCR and CLC lines to Mickle Trafford where we joined the Birkenhead Joint route to Frodsham Junction. From Frodsham Junction was travelled over the Halton Curve to Runcorn and then on via Allerton to Wavertree Junction. We then travelled over the Edge Hill Circular Goods Line and passed through Exhibition and Edge Lane Junctions to gain access to the Bootle Branch. At Bootle Junction we joined the former LYR Southport line and travelled to Hall Road.

It ended with Les being slightly injured whilst we were `loose` shunting his brake van upon arrival at Hall Road – which was entirely his own fault.

This led to him, a few weeks later, turning up at Mollington Street looking like George Raft...but that is another story..... **Denis Flood**



## The Slow Death of the CLC North Liverpool Extension Line



***A track lifting train brings about the absolute end for the former CLC North Liverpool Extension Line at Halewood on 6<sup>th</sup> June 1979. The view shows track lifting on the west curve of the Halewood 'triangle' just a few hundred yards short of the CLC main line. Photo by Brian Roberts***

The history of the Cheshire Lines Committee (CLC) North Liverpool Extension Line was covered in On Shed Volume 3, Number 1 back in March 2013 but in this article the slow death of the line will be explored in more detail (On Shed Vol 3 No. 1 is available to download from the 8D Association website).

The North Liverpool Extension Line stretched from Halewood in the South to Aintree in the north and had a branch to Huskisson that diverged from the main line at Fazakeley South Junction. At the beginning of 1960 the line was part of British Railways London Midland Region and it carried a heavy freight traffic mostly connected to the Liverpool docks. Other through freight services included the Long Meg to Widnes Anhydrite trains which travelled to the North Liverpool Extension Line via Ormskirk and Aintree. They stabled at Walton Triangle overnight and then ran on to Tanhouse Lane in Widnes via Halewood East Junction, Hough Green Junction and Widnes Central. Freight services also came onto the line from the former Midland Railway Langton Dock branch and there were goods facilities at Gateacre, Knotty Ash and West Derby stations.

Passenger services over the line consisted a handful of Aintree Central – Manchester Central services and slightly more frequent Gateacre – Liverpool Central services. There were also scheduled through services between Stockport Tiviot Dale and Southport Chapel Street during the summer period (reflecting the Southport Lord Street services which had run until 7 July 1952). The most intensive service of

passenger trains ran on Grand National Day when services travelled over the line from all over the country.

Walton-on-the-Hill was the primary depot which provided and serviced locomotives working the North Liverpool Extension Line.

Although the line was extremely busy in 1960 and nobody at that time could foresee its closure, the passenger service to the north of Gateacre had come under scrutiny. At this time it consisted of only four up and three down trains Monday-to-Friday. With the last up departure from Gateacre being at 8.35am and the first Monday to Friday down departure being at 5.50pm the service was next to useless for anything other than work journeys. The service between Gateacre and Aintree was proposed for withdrawal and the last regular passenger trains to run north of Gateacre did so on Saturday 5 November 1960. Clubmoor and Warbreck stations closed completely, Knotty Ask and West Derby stations remained open for goods only and Aintree Central was retained for the Grand National specials which ran once per year. Interestingly the Gateacre to Liverpool Central service was improved with DMUs becoming the norm and an hourly frequency was introduced.

On 15 December 1963 Walton-on-the-Hill Locomotive Depot was closed and the work was transferred to Aintree.

In March the following year the last Grand National specials ran over the North Liverpool Extension Line to Aintree Central. The station was formally closed on 7 December 1964 but it was used in 1965 but only by trains that came in from the north. The year 1964 also saw West Derby close to public goods on 1 June and the



*The Edge Hill breakdown train seen on the west curve of the Halewood 'triangle' in the winter of 1963. Photo by Jim Peden*



***Target 21 is seen passing through Knotty Ash station on its way to Edge Hill during the early months of 1975. A class 40 is at the head of the train of box vans. The desolate scene is typical of the North Liverpool Extension Line in that period.***  
**Photo by Norman Daley**

signal box there closed on 8 November 1964. The Long Meg to Widnes Anhydrite trains were diverted to run via a different route towards the end of 1964.

The summer of 1964 also saw the last day-trip services to and from Southport Chapel Street.

On 26 June 1966 the up line between Fazakerley West Junction and Huskisson Goods station was taken out of use. The down line between the two locations became a bi-directional single track. The up line was lifted shortly after. The removal of the up line facilitated the building of the Queens Drive fly over at Walton. It penetrated Walton-on-the-Hill Number 1 tunnel making the up side unusable. British Railways had clearly agreed to this work despite the limitations that it placed on the route. Clearly even at that time the line was viewed by its owners as being in decline.

On 14 May 1967 the inner triangle at Halewood and all of the sidings there were taken out of use. Halewood had been an important marshalling facility and its closure reflects the downturn in freight in only a few years.

In the run up to the end of steam the North Liverpool Extension Line was popular with Rail Tours.

The Up and Down sidings at Walton Triangle were taken out of use on 17 April 1967: they were disconnected from the main line on 12 May 1968 and lifted shortly after. Also on 12 May 1968 the line between Fazakerley West and Fazakerley North Junction was taken out of use and had been lifted by mid-summer 1968.



**Left: The up platform at Clubmoor station seen from a northbound train after it had closed in the 1960s. The train was either a rail tour or one of the summer Southport Chapel Street services. Photo from the John Mann Collection**

On 9 September 1968 the Walton-on-the-Hill station sidings which had been used for deliveries of coal

closed completely.

The 1897 line between Halewood East Junction and Halewood North Junction closed on 28 October 1968, regular traffic over it having ceased on 5 August 1968. Halewood North Junction signal box closed on 27 October 1968. All that was left of the North Liverpool Extension Line at the Halewood triangle was a double track railway along the west curve.

On 22 September 1968 Fazakerley North Junction signal box was destroyed by fire. This prevented trains from using the line between the south junction and Aintree and the Langton branch. Official closure came on 1 January 1969, and the track as far as Aintree Central and down to Langton was lifted in August 1969. Fazakerley South Junction signal box closed on 2 January 1969 but it had been out of use since 22 September 1968.

On 22 February 1969 the last passenger train ran along the North Liverpool Extension Line. It was a DMU rail tour called the Liverpool Docker. The tour visited Huskisson and treated its passengers to a run along the line in both directions.

On 22 November 1969 Fazakerley West Junction signal box burnt down. Since the closure of the line to north junction its only real purpose was to control the point at which the line became a single track down to Huskisson. The solution was to single the line from west junction to Knotty Ash. This came into effect on 30 November 1969 when the signal box was officially closed. All that remained of the once extensive Walton triangle was a single track on its southern side.

Freight services by this time consisted of trip workings to Huskisson and coal trains to Clarence Dock Power Station (which ran via Huskisson and then through the site of Sandon & Canada Dock goods station). There were also trip workings of coal to Knotty Ash.



Knotty Ash & Stanley signal box was closed on 18 January 1970 and it was replaced with a ground frame.

The hourly service between Gateacre and Liverpool Central had been listed for withdrawal in the Reshaping of British Railways Report (Beeching Report) of 1963 and notices had been posted in BR timetables regarding its cessation in 1964 and 1968. Vociferous campaigning had kept what had become a popular service going and much to the chagrin of British Railways it had made it into the 1970s. There were 19 departures from Gateacre Monday-to-Friday and 18 on Saturdays. It was however the only service using the large terminus at Liverpool Central and diversion to Lime Street was blocked on the grounds of capacity there. Work was due to start in 1972 at the Liverpool Central site to create the Liverpool Loop and Link underground lines. Because the station site was required permission was finally obtained for the withdrawal of the Gateacre service and it ran for the last time on Saturday 15 April 1972. Gateacre station was closed but the intention was that it should reopen within a few years as part of an expanded Merseyrail system. As things turned out it was never to reopen.

The coal yard at Knotty Ash ceased to be rail served from 1 May 1972 and its



connection to the main line was removed in October 1972.

The line between **Left: A Liverpool Central service is seen at Gateacre on Saturday 15 April 1972. Photo by K G Rose**

Gateacre and Knotty Ash was singled on 21 October 1972.

By 1973 there was only one booked train in each direction over the North

Liverpool Extension Line. It was an Edge Hill to Huskisson and return working given the reporting number of Target 21.

There was a fire at Gateacre signal box in August 1973, and British Rail officially closed it on 26 September 1973. The line from Gateacre to Hunts Cross West Junction was singled. The North Liverpool Extension Line was now a single track branch between Hunts Cross West Junction signal box and Huskisson Goods station. The line was controlled by a token which was kept at the signal box. The line had taken on a real air of dereliction and it suffered heavily from vandalism. Train crews referred to the route as bomb alley as they so often came under a bombardment of bricks and stones when traversing it.



**Left: Aintree Central station in 1969. Photo by Nick Catford**

By May 1975 the Target 21 service was not even running daily and it ceased altogether in July 1975. The line was mothballed.

Since 1966 the North Liverpool Extension Line had been identified as an ideal opportunity to create a belt line around the eastern edge of the city. In 1969 the

Merseyside Passenger Transport Authority was created and it adopted many of the ideas. A Transport and Works Order was secured in 1971 for the creation of new underground lines in Liverpool City centre and the electrification of routes, including the North Liverpool Extension Line. The irony of this is that during this period when the line was being proposed as a key part of the evolving Merseyrail Network, British Railways were running it down and singling it. Even more bizarrely, whilst the plan for reopening and electrification was still live track lifting began.

Track lifting started at the northern end of the line in late 1978. The line was lifted by a track lifting train which ran on Sundays. It was propelled to Huskisson from where it began its sorry task. By February 1979 it had reached the site of Childwall station (closed to passengers on 1 January 1931). The final section of the line at Halewood west curve was taken up on 6 June 1979.

The former CLC main line between Liverpool Central and Garston opened to electric services on 3 January 1978. The intention had been to push that electrification on to Gateacre as a next phase but recession and a change in government in 1979 put an end to those plans. The belt line idea for the North Liverpool Extension Line was quietly dropped in 1980 by which time it had been lifted anyway. The belt line would have been an interesting and no doubt very busy part of the Merseyrail network had it been built, and a feature about it will appear in a future edition of On Shed.

During the late 1980s and through the 1990s the North Liverpool Extension Line (but not the Huskisson branch) was converted into a footpath/cycleway known as the loop line path. **Paul Wright**

#### **Warrington Railway Pensioners**

8D Association Members are welcome to sign up for trips that are organised by the Warrington Railway Pensioners group. The trips are by coach and run from Warrington and if you are interested in going on any of the ones listed below just contact Roy Dixon on 01925 638299. All trips are on Wednesdays.

**Wednesday 7 June 2017 – Ravenglass & Eskdale Railway and Muncaster Castle**

**Wednesday 5 July 2017 – York**

**Wednesday 2 August 2017 – Aberystwyth**

**Wednesday 20 September 2017 – Manchester Ship Canal**

**From the Archive**



*The site of Ann Street Halt looking south towards Widnes Dock Junction seen in the early months of 1967. The bridge abutment seen in the foreground was part of the GR/MR Joint line which passed over Ann Street Halt. Photo by Richard Mercer*



*A Liverpool Exchange to Glasgow service is seen passing through Kirkdale station in 1967. These trains were the very last scheduled services to use steam locomotives. They ran right up until August 1968. Photo by John Gahan*

## Events Programme

**10.00 – Saturday 10 June 2017 – Visit to the Wigan Junction Railway at Culcheth –** A guided walk along the former Wigan Junction Railway from Culcheth to the site of Newchurch Halt. **Meet at the Culcheth Linear Park car park off Wigshaw Lane (the site of Culcheth station).**

**10.00 – Saturday 24 June 2017 – Visit to North Liverpool Docks –** An opportunity to see the present-day railway operations within the north Liverpool Docks and some surviving remnants of the once extensive MDHB system. The visit is limited to 20 so booking is required. Please contact Paul Wright on 0151 630 5132 or email [pwright964@btinternet.com](mailto:pwright964@btinternet.com)

**19.00 – Thursday 6 July 2017 – The Great Central & Midland Joint Railway Widnes Branch at Widnes –** A guided walk led by Richard Mercer looking at the course of the GC&MR Joint Railway at Widnes. Very little remains of this line unless you know where to look. **Meet in the Widnes Hub Car Park (the Cinema and Ice Ring just off Watkinson Way).**  
**Easy/Flat/Short Walk**

**10:00 – Saturday 22 July 2017 – The Birkenhead and Wallasey Dock System –** A guided walk led by Paul wright looking at the railways of the Birkenhead and Wallasey Dock system. There is still a great deal to be seen in this fascinating area. **Meet outside Birkenhead Hamilton Square station. The walk will end outside Birkenhead Park station.**  
**Easy/Flat/Long Walk**

**10.00 – Saturday 5 August 2017 – Visit to the Windmill Animal Farm Miniature Railway -** The railway was set up in 1997. The collection includes stock from the Lakeside Railway at Southport, the Romney Hythe and Dymchurch Railway and Liverpool Garden Festival. There will be a charge of £4.00 per person. **THE WINDMILL ANIMAL FARM, Red Cat Lane, Burscough, Lancashire. L40 1UQ.**

**19.00 – Thursday 17 August 2017 – The CLC Helsby – Mouldsworth branch.** A guided walk led by Paul Wright looking at a once important freight route that survived until relatively recent times. **Meet on Manley Lane, Manley, underneath the railway bridge. There is space to park on Manley Lane just to the west of the railway bridge.** **Rough ground/Hills/Medium Distance Walk**

## Where is This Competition



**'Where is this' competition?** (Answers to [pwright964@btinternet.com](mailto:pwright964@btinternet.com))  
**Photo by Dave Hughes.**

**The March competition was correctly guessed by Arthur Turner. The location was south of Runcorn station taken from Greenway Road bridge.**

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