

Railways In and Around Stafford
by Edward Talbot
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- A Postscript

Page 1: The end of the caption should read: '... a 'Precursor' class 4-4-0.'

Page 8: The red granite drinking fountain which was on platform 1 was not incorporated in the new station but was not destroyed. It is now in the museum at Chasewater. I discovered it there by pure chance on 5th June 2014!

Page 40 (upper): The 'large LNWR tank engine' clearly has a Belpaire firebox and so cannot be an 0-8-2 tank (or an 0-8-4 tank, for that matter). It can only be a 4-6-2 'Superheater Tank'. However, as a matter of incidental interest, in the 1928 LMS block allocation two 0-8-2 tanks, LMS No. 7883 and 7884, were allocated to Stafford; No. 7884 was at Stafford from 27th May 1927 to 5th December 1928.

Page 61 (lower). This train might in fact be 'The Merseyside Express' or, perhaps more likely, a Sunday morning Liverpool-Euston train using the same stock. Whichever, it has been diverted to platform 6 rather than platform 1, almost certainly because of permanent-way work of some kind, as in page 69 upper. The main interest of the picture is that it shows the signals which controlled the scissors crossing. As they were located under the roof, they could only be seen properly from the platform, or from the footplates of engines standing at it.

Page 74. The allocations have been cut off part way through 1959. The complete allocations for 1959 and 1965 are given below, along with the LMS block allocation for 1928. In another publication two 'Jubilees' are shown as allocated to Stafford on 1st January 1937. This is an error, probably caused by confusing the numbers of 'Prince of Wales' class with those of 'Jubilees'. Certainly, no 'Jubilees' were ever allocated to Stafford shed.

1928

'Prince of Wales' 4-6-0: 5823, 5824, 5825, 5826, 5827, 5828; 'Rebuilt Precursor' 4-4-0: 5270 *Marmion*, 5271 *Gaelic*, 5272 *Brindley*, 5273 *Jason*, 5274 *Hecate*, 5275 *Tiger*, 5276 *Titan*, 5277 *Oberon*, 5278 *Precursor*, 5279 *Sunbeam*, 5280 *Shooting Star*; 'Precursor' 4-4-0: 5228 *Penguin*, 5229 *Servia*, 5230 *Arab*; 'Experiment' 4-6-0: 5488 *Princess Alice*, 5489 *Henry Bessemer*; '6ft 6in Jumbo' 2-4-0: 5041 *Lynx*, 5042 *The Auditor*; 'G1' 0-8-0: 9011, 9019, 9021, 9022; '19in Goods' 4-6-0: 8765, 8766, 8798, 8799; '17in Coal' 8235, 8236; '18in Goods' 0-6-0; '5ft 6in' 2-4-2 tank: 6679, 6680, 6681, 6682, 6750, 6751, 6752; 0-8-2 tank: 7883, 7884; 'Special Tank' 0-6-0ST: 7311, 7392, 7399, 7420

1959

LMS class '2P' 4-4-0: 40583, 40646, 40678. Class '4' 2-6-4: 42309, 42347, 42389, 42400, 42425, 42562. Class '3F' 0-6-0 Tank: 47359, 47475, 47588, 47590, 47649, 47653, 47665. Ex-LNWR '7F' 0-8-0: 48943, 49081, 49115, 49126, 49198, 49357, 49410, 49446.

1965

Fowler '4' 2-6-4 Tank: 42381. Class '5' 4-6-0: 44813, 44963, 45110, 45147, 45374. Class '3F' 0-6-0 Tank: 47359, 47665. Class '8F' 2-8-0: 48602.

Extracts from Letters from Anthony J. East

This has been a very enjoyable book for me. It brought back so many memories of my youth, as we lived in Ingestre Road, off the Wolverhampton Road, and you can see the chimney pots of our house in some of the photos. Crinoline Bridge was my second home, and I well recall the sound of engines shunting, with the clinking and clanking of buffers even in the early hours of the morning and the periodic shaking of the house as an express thundered by. When I first went to Bristol and lived in Wills Hall in Stoke Bishop, far from any railway sounds, I could not sleep at first as it was too quiet! One of my contemporaries at Wills, incidentally, was Philip Millard.

I remember going to Milford on the train as a little boy, but while I recall the waterworks pumping station very well and the way you went down steps from the road bridge to the platforms, I cannot recall either the signals or the station itself. In later days I often cycled that way with my Dad, and for many years after the demolition of Milford station, you could see where the entrances had been in the parapets of the bridge.

The only thing in the whole book that disappoints me is that there is not a really good picture of the tall eight-armed down signal gantry at Stafford No. 1 box. This was visible from all around my home neighbourhood and while you get a glimpse of it in the pictures on page 40, it deserves better coverage! It was a fine four-doll gantry and had splendid LNWR lower-quadrant signal arms. If you got close to it, you could see the holes in the slow-road arms where rings had been fitted in LNWR days. About 1954-5, the whole gantry was removed one weekend and two rather nondescript LMS standard tubular post brackets installed, more or less in the same place as the gantry. Removing it seemed to alter the whole aspect of the scene. The track layout was not altered until about 1959, when the twin brackets were shifted about ¼ mile, to the eastern side of Crinoline Bridge, and a double track crossover between paired tracks installed where the old gantry had stood. They could not have lasted long there, as all semaphores were swept away when the wires went up in 1962.

I well recall freight trains lining up one behind the other, as you say. There was a water column of typical LNWR design nicely placed for engines to top up their tanks while waiting for the gantry signal to come off. One very hot day in 1942 I was at Crinoline Bridge with my Grandad and there were two freights lined up so that the engine of the second one was right under the bridge. The driver was wearing a knotted hanky on his head and Grandad called out to him something about it being a hot job on a Summer's day. The driver shouted back it was 'like a Dutch oven' in the cab and I used that expression for years without ever knowing what a Dutch oven was! While all this banter was going on, I was fascinated by the engine and excitedly told my mother when we got home that I had seen a 'funny old red engine with a flat face'! There is only one engine that can fit that description and it must have been No. 6004, the last 'Claughton', which I believe was shedded at Edge Hill at the time. Although it was some years before she was withdrawn, I never saw her again.

I think I can vaguely remember a LNWR 4-4-0 with big circular wheel bosses round the back of the station in platform 3 around 1943 or so, when going on holiday to Rhyl. I gather that *Ptarmigan* was the last 'George the Fifth' class 4-4-0 and was put out to grass at Stafford, pottering up and down to Salop, but whether it was the engine I saw I cannot be sure now. I certainly remember *Lusitania* and *Queen of the Belgians*, as they used to shunt the south end yards and were often to be seen at Crinoline Bridge.

As well as Crinoline Bridge, we also used to watch trains from the bottom of Shrewsbury Road, where there was a wooden fence made of planks sawn from old sleepers (judging by the chair holes, four per chair). This was pretty battered by 1947, so we little boys could get through and visit the old South Yard engine shed by Dinham's Wagon Works. The odd thing about the shed was that around 1946 the doors were partially replanked in the same downwards chevron pattern as the original but were never repainted all the same colour. This can be seen quite clearly in a photograph published with an article on the Trent Valley line in *Meccano Magazine* in 1947, in which the new planks are much paler than the originals, which were a buff-colour, as I recall. As the years went by, the doors remained parti-coloured - they never were repainted (page 40, bottom - and that is 1960!).

About the same time as this replanking of the doors, an extra siding was put in at the South End yards alongside the dirt road ('the backs') that led along behind Salt Avenue. It only held about fifteen wagons but the great thing was that it was only separated from the 'backs' by the thickness of the spiked railings. Sometimes a 'Jinty' or a 'Duck 8' would come along there to shunt a few wagons and you could get right close up to it. This was awe-inspiring - you could feel the heat being radiated from the boiler and hear the rails creaking under the weight of the engine. I can still remember seeing the first 'Duck 8' with a plain smokebox dart - previously they had LNWR handwheels. I liked this innovation as it made them look more like GWR engines but of course I now prefer a LNWR engine to look like it should!

There was a remarkable collection of old tenders parked to collect the lime sludge from the water-softening plant. Most of them were later LNWR tenders (Cooke types, I guess) and some were still there as late as 1967, including two ex-LYR 8-wheelers with Aspinall double elliptical springs, probably originally from the class 31 big-boilered LYR 0-8-0s. There was a filter pump and press in a corrugated asbestos hut on stilts, that used to filter off the sludge. It is visible in the bottom picture on page 39. You could just see the top of the eccentric that drove the filter pump up and down when it was working, if you stood in the right place on the ground. The only other place with such a plant was Bescot and sometimes there was a whole rake of sludge tenders parked at the side of one of the triangular junctions on the way into Birmingham from Wolverhampton.

I well recall the LNWR three-doll bracket signals near Stafford No. 4 box, because they had a whole galaxy of arms for both directions on each post - the LNWR, being thrifty, often did this. In the down direction there was a set of splitting distant, one post having a starter arm above it, and this puzzled me mightily as a boy when one day I saw the starter arm come off on one post simultaneously with the distant on the other! I knew nothing about splitting distant at that time.

In 1955 I was invited as a member of the Stafford and District Youth Clubs Members' Council to visit the new Stafford No. 5 box and we had a whole evening with Councillor Rees Tyler. I remember how hard it was to pull off a semaphore arm and how much physical effort it needed. By contrast, the levers for the colour light signals were very easy to pull off! These were about 3in shorter than the mechanical levers and painted in the standard colours. Councillor Tyler told us he had started his railway career on the Rhymney Railway in 1921. He went on to become Mayor of Stafford and opened the new station in 1962.

One thing intrigues me mightily, as it is obvious from the photographs that it really did happen. In fact, I remember it happening at the time and it puzzled me then and it still puzzles me now! Originally the little gantry of dwarf starter arms for Bays 1 and 2 were just plain home arms (page 62, middle, and page 64, bottom). Some time in the 1950s, certainly before 1958, distant arms were added underneath the starters, and they were all standard LNWR lower-quadrant dwarf signals (page 65, top). So why were they still using a pre-grouping signal arm design in the 1950s? They must have had to dig around at Crewe Works to find two matching LNWR dwarf distant arms! Were these the last LNWR signals ever to be installed new? The last LNWR signal I remember near Stafford was the down distant at Penkrudge Goods, which survived well after 1956.

I vividly remember the Stafford floods because a whole row of houses in Pilgrim Street collapsed and we all went to see, but whether that was 1946 or 1947 I cannot say. I also remember going down to Greengate Street and you could not go any further than the Town Library as everywhere was under water.

The photograph at the top of page 48 probably shows a group of Siemens (later English Electric Company, now General Electric Company) apprentices. My mother was born in 1897 and began in the Progress Department at Siemens, working for a Mr Butters, in 1913 when she was sixteen. She had a remarkable photographic memory (which people tell me I inherited too) and more than once in the early 1950s, my Dad (who put in 47 years with EEC) would tell her over lunch about some repair job that had come into Stafford Works (often a burnt out alternator rotor) which he had had to strip down ready for it to be re-wound in the Winding Shop. My Mom would ask about it and then rattle off the lot number, the job numbers and even sometimes some of the drawing numbers! As progress chaser, she would have

been familiar with all this, but her remarkable memory enabled her to recall these details even thirty years later.

Anyway, she would often tell the tale of how the apprentices joined up *en masse* one late summer day in 1914 and marched down to Stafford station with a fife and drum band and Union Jacks waving and how all the girls in the offices, including her (she would only be 17) lined the sides of Siemens Drive by the old Main Office building to cheer them on, many with tears in their eyes and waving hankies. She said that of the 187 lads that joined up (not all at once on that actual day) about twenty eventually came back whole in body (although not all in mind), another forty or so came back missing limbs or an eye or terribly scarred and the rest never came back. They were victims of the folly of the 'Join up with Your Pals' policy to encourage volunteer enlistment. In effect, it guaranteed that whole communities of young men would be wiped out together at Mons, Ypres, the Somme and so on. She used to tell of one poor chap who came back to his old job in the 1920s and would periodically go into violent fits in the office, throwing imaginary hand-grenades and storming 'over the top' of phantom trenches. These days we call it 'post-traumatic stress disorder'.

So I feel it is very probable that this photo shows some of these unfortunate young men. Some look quite smartly dressed, and there would certainly have been a number of Premium Apprentices who would have later on gone on to get engineering degrees at university, had it not been for the Great War. The fact that Siemens was a German firm adds a poignancy to the scene.

I dimly remember the old steam shed with its hipped slate roof before it was rebuilt with a northlight roof. We used to sneak in through the open door that led out on to Bagnall's Bridge and you could often get a good view of an engine being turned on the turntable there. Usually it was a freight engine - I recall a Stanier 2-8-0 and a WD 2-8-0 being turned on separate occasions - and the second time we were chased out by an angry foreman!

I keep looking at the photos of the last train on the S&U in 1957 trying to find myself in one of them. I only wished we could have gone four years earlier in 1953, when all the GNR somersault signals were still in existence. There used to be a gorgeous "sky-arm" distant with the lamp half-way down the post at Weston, just where the A518 crossed the line near a low girder bridge over the river. The signal post must have been all of 45ft high.

So I was fascinated by the pictures of the GNR and LNER trains at Stafford, both at the Common and at the town station. I had never realised either that the trains from the old 'GN' bay had to reverse out 'wrong road' to get to the junction at Venables. There were two somersault signals on concrete posts, one for up and one for down, that stood between the Stone Road and the Eccleshall Road bridges. They lasted a long time, certainly up to 1960. When I was very little, my mother would take me up to the town cemetery with me in the pushchair, so that would be about 1941, and I remember once seeing a black LNER tank engine shunting at Common Station - I believe it was an N1 0-6-2 tank. The S&U had an exotic quality, and seeing some of the old Stirling 2-4-0s and Ivatt 4-4-0s on the line makes me wonder how they got up Chartley Bank or Hopton Bank on a slippery wet day, even with only three tatty ex-GNR flat-roofed carriages!

And a later e-mail from Tony East:

I did enjoy the book on the 0-8-0 locos and the correspondence later on various topics in the LNWR Soc newsletter. One thing I would comment is that I do not believe that only the 8-coupled locos had the syncopated Joy valve gear beat: "WHOFF -WHOFF- puff -puff" but since there were so many of them when we were young, we recall them the most easily. I recall that oftentimes the three P.o.W. 4-6-0's would shunt the South End yards at Stafford during the 1945-8 period, *Lusitania*, *Queen of the Belgians* and possibly No. 25752. The LNWR must have been unique in using tender locos for shunting so much - the Jinties did not come in much until the early 1950's at the South End yards and Super-D's were almost always used. Anyway, I seem to recall the 4-6-0's also had the same exhaust beat -particularly when revving up for a bit of loose shunting. This was often done and I can recall the lively sprints the shunter made to change the points, yanking over the weighted point lever with his shunter's pole. The wagons would run along quite smartly and crash into the stationary ones with a

bang: on one occasion I saw a wagon jump up a good six inches on its springs and settle back - luckily without locking the buffers!

I refer you to J N Maskelyne's book where he says the Whale Precursor 4-4-0s had "the characteristic uneven tattoo that was the mark of Joy valve gear - a couple of dashes and two dots per revolution of the driving wheels." Again, in his article on the George V class he says that No. 1371 *Quail* was a favourite of his "usually to the accompaniment of a remarkably syncopated exhaust". So it seems to have been a general phenomenon and the fact that the Precursors had **coil springs** (did the Georges too?) could explain why if they bounced up and down on their springs and thus upset the accuracy of the motion. Not that it seemed to matter! Did the Cauliflowers have a syncopated beat too? Most large LNWR engines (apart from the Claughtons) were really quite light and could have bounced around a lot more than say those LYR engines with Joy gear. Anyway, food for thought.

From Tim Shuttleworth

I remember when Gnosall had a passenger service; I travelled the line twice, once behind one of Stafford's ex-MR 4-40 tender engines, and once (when the Shifnal bridge was being replaced) behind a 'Hall' on a Paddington-Birkenhead train which took the connecting link between Cannock Road and Bushbury, normally used only for the shunted exchange of goods stock. The train then travelled on through Four Ashes and Penkridge and at Stafford ran through the centre lines and should have taken the Wellington branch. However, the signalman made a mistake, and the train sailed gaily on past the branch, resulting in the need for a 'wrong line order' to allow the train to reverse and try again! Bill Camwell was on the platform at Stafford, filming; needless to say he was highly amused.

One day in late 1944 or early 1945, I was observing traffic at Stafford station and watched the afternoon Shrewsbury train leave behind a 'Prince', running tender first, presumably attached at very short notice. Those were the days!

Photos from Tim Shuttleworth

In one of my e-mail messages last year I mentioned the Shifnal bridge diversions of 1953. I have now printed the two Bill Camwell pictures for you and have put them in the post today in the hope that you will accept them as a little 'thank you' gift for your help and advice last year. Unfortunately Bill did not take still pictures, as far as I know, of the train which took the wrong line at Stafford, although he did film the performance. I have now looked up my original notes; this, briefly, is a record of the trip I made on Sunday October 18th 1953: At Wolverhampton I bought a half-day excursion ticket for Wellington (two and ninepence) and travelled on the 8-30am Leamington to Birkenhead train which arrived behind an ex-GWR 2-6-2T, and consisted of eight carriages, one ex-LMS. This was replaced by 1025 'County of Radnor' behind which I travelled to Wellington via Cannock Road Junction, Bushbury, and Stafford. At the extreme end of Bushbury sidings the train passed a B'ham-Blackpool excursion which was held at the Showell Road bridge; this train should really have preceded the Birkenhead train and by failing to do so confused the signalman at Stafford. The WR train sailed gaily through the station, centre line, apparently en route for Blackpool, and drew to a halt at the first signal beyond the junction for Shrewsbury. The train had to reverse, going right back into the station to the position in which the 'Hall' is shown in one of the photographs, and then (correctly signalled this time) set off again for Wellington. At Wellington I waited for the 9-0am Birkenhead to Paddington train on which I returned to Wolverhampton, via Stafford, Bushbury, and Cannock Road Junction. During the wait at Wellington 2-6-4T 42668 came in from Stafford on the local train (I'd forgotten there was a Sunday service on the line). It was almost 30 minutes late, so the engine quickly ran round the carriages and left again, bunker first, for Stafford, about 28 minutes late. The Paddington train then came in, headed by Hall 5962, and left at 12-42, nineteen minutes late. It is this train that appears in Cam's picture at Gnosall. The train was lightly loaded and I had a compartment to myself. (I did on the outward journey, too, after I had ejected two smokers (fishermen) from my non-smoking compartment). On a subsequent Sunday in November, when diversions were still taking place, I photographed Castle 5015 passing Bushbury sheds with a Paddington train; Gnosall saw quite a variety of ex-GWR 4-6-0's I imagine. I had forgotten that I had travelled behind a 'County', my memory (such as it is) had led me to believe that the train was headed by a 'Hall'. Just as well I kept notes!

Hope you like the pictures!