



Great Western
Society



TAUNTON GROUP JOURNAL



2020



Edition

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GROUP COMMITTEE FOR 2020 as elected at the GROUP ANNUAL MEETING

Stuart Trott	Chairman
Francis Lewis	Vice-Chairman and Scribe
David Hartland	Secretary
David Brabner	Treasurer and Spendthrift
Peter Triggs	Welfare Officer and Programme
Philip Izzard	Audio Visual Aids & Catering
Richard Studley	Our Man in Wellington
Roger Hagley	Publicity Stand and Membership
Chris Penney	Publicity Coordinator
Carl Honnor	Senior Committee Member

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Cover Photo: 'Lysander at Dawlish' by Philip Hawkins

Castle 5079 *Lysander*, a Newton Abbot (83A) engine, heads an Up express through the spray along Dawlish sea front during the late 1950s. Built at Swindon in 1939, 5079 was originally named *Lydford Castle*. It was renamed by the Great Western after the Yeovil-based Westland Aircraft's Lysander short take-off and landing (STOL) monoplane. Originally designed for an army co-operation role, the Lysander was put to use as an air-sea rescue spotter searching for downed RAF airmen during the Battle of Britain. It was one of twelve Castles to be renamed between 1940 and 1941 after British designed military aircraft in use at the time.

This fine new print by Philip Hawkins is available from quicksilverpublishing.co.uk or visit philipdhawkins.co.uk

EDITORIAL

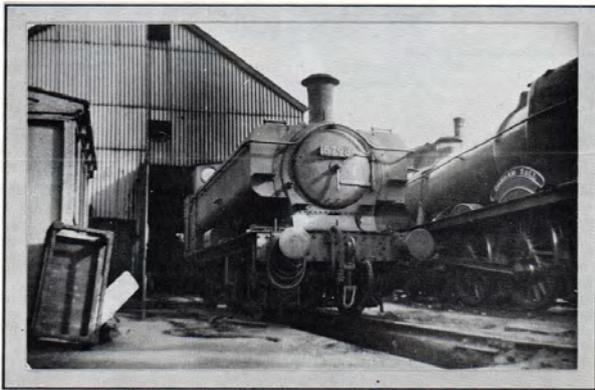
I was the first editor of 83B back in 1979 and it seems strange to be back doing the job again. The reason is that both Richard Studley and Roger Hagley have had health problems recently, and I have been drafted in to help with the task. We wish them both a speedy recovery.

These are difficult times and it has been particularly a torrid time for the Group. Our meetings have been suspended, our trips curtailed, and to all intents and purposes we have ceased to function. We understand that for many of our members it has been a difficult and lonely time. The editorial for that first 1979 issue included these words:

Many of our members find it difficult or impossible to attend meetings; it therefore follows that a healthy, forward-looking journal is needed to unite the Group and provide that much-needed pool of information from which we can all learn.....here is a chance for group members to air their views in public and entertain the Somerset area with their writings.



Journal of the
Great Western Society
Taunton Group



January 1979

How true that statement remains! I hope that this issue of 83B will help to restore enthusiasm for railway matters, remind you all of good times past and look forward to those to come. The 1979 issue was produced on my manual typewriter, with the cover lettering drawn by hand. Forty years on things have changed totally, and with the digital age I have arranged this issue entirely on the computer using Microsoft Publisher. People often talk of the Victorian era as the most intensive time for technical progress, but I think those of us who have lived over the last half century have experienced at least as dramatic a series of changes.

This issue coincides with two significant 80th anniversaries—the Battle of Britain and the Norton Fitzwarren derailment, both occurring in the autumn of 1940. Chris Penney has contributed two articles on the connections between the military and the railway, and there is an article which reveals some new information about the Norton accident and who was indeed responsible for the crash.

Included with this issue is a programme card for 2021 for members to retain, and a Flyer for members to pass on to anyone interested, to encourage them to join our events. Both show our provisional programme for 2021, with the proviso that the virus restrictions on meetings have been lifted by then.

Items for the next 83B can be submitted by Email using the email address, or by post to my home address details (inside the front cover) or by hand to any member of the Committee.

David Hartland

Chairman's Report

to the 48th Group Annual Meeting 21st February 2020

This past year has not been the best for the Taunton Group. Although our meetings and visits were well supported it is some of our most regular members/supporters who have been unwell reducing our ability to function as we have in the past. Unfortunately illness has prevented the video evenings from taking place and so this social activity has stopped. Other illness has seen the cancellation of attendance by our publicity team at the Taunton Model Railway exhibition and more recently the publication of 83B in the usual format just was not possible. However having said that the Group is still functioning and looking forward to 2020 with a great programme of speakers and some very interesting ideas for visits. Hopefully 83B will be produced, so interesting articles will be most welcome. Also our Publicity team are planning for events during the year having successfully visited Weston Super Mare Model Railway exhibition in January. The programme of speakers for the last year was a good spread of subjects but had to be changed or rearranged to accommodate speakers illness/cancellation putting much extra work on the programme secretary.

The 2019 - 20 programme started after the GAM when Richard Antliff Civil Engineering Manager at the Didcot Railway Centre and a member of this group, gave an interesting and amusing talk which he titled 'The Great Western Way'. "East of Penzance was the title of Roger Marsh's talk In March and on Good Friday Jack Boskett gave us 'Railways to Royalty'. In May there was a change to the programme when Peter Triggs stepped in with a superb selection of slides taken from his vast collection. Freddie Huxtable in June gave a most inspiring and nostalgic presentation 'The Great Western Route Taunton/Barnstaple. In July Peter Triggs again stepped in to cover from the cancellation of David Oldham with Peter's version of 'The Best of Western Steam', which was extremely well received. August is a time reserved for members/friends to put together short presentations and again this year there was a good selection of subjects ranging from railways to aircraft to ships. The evening was masterminded by Francis Lewis, our Vice Chairman, and was very well received by those present. A change in September took us to 'Railways in Pakistan and Germany' by Peter Tickner. A change in October saw Ian Bennett, who had to be cancelled previously, come along to give us a 'Miscellany of Railways' which was well received, Once a year we take a meeting to Wellington in addition to our meetings at Stoke St. Mary and this year Amyas Crump gave us 'More of Peter Gray's The West Country'. Peter is remember by a good number of us in the Group both socially and as a presenter and Amyas was able to bring those memories back to us at Wellington. Another change in November saw our own Peter Triggs give another evening of memories in his presentation 'Our Railway, The last 40 years'. To finish 2019 John Sparks took us along 'The Marches to Holyhead'. Again another fine collection of nostalgic memories. January 2020 saw another change as Francis Lewis was able to help out with his presentation '1994, Was it really 25 years ago?' Francis brought to view many situations long forgotten but happily remembered.

Although a number of our members/friends were able to get out to see the Duchess of Sutherland making its way to Bishops Lydeard in April and the Great Britain 12 the visit to Crofton on August Bank holiday was the only organised trip for the year. Some sixteen of us left Taunton in thick fog for the trip to Crofton which was organised by David Brabner. On arrival the sun was shining and so remained for the rest of the day. The great beam engines were being prepared with the Swindon built Boiler in full steam. Both Beams were in action and great volumes of water pumped. To see it in action greatly helps to appreciate its need. Viewed from the canal it was not only possible to see why the location was necessary but to then see the railway which made the canal unnecessary. Fortunately both the railway and canal survive as does the pumping station. A splendid visit. Leaving Crofton we drove to Hungerford although I did a slight detour and visited Wilton Windmill. Sadly the mill was not working but with deep blue skies above it was a superb sight. David had arranged for us a trip on the canal boat 'The Rose' with afternoon tea and Scones. This was appreciated by all and the trip to Kintbury was much enjoyed.

As in recent years the annual get together for members/friends/supporters and partners took place at The White Horse at Bradford on Tone on Tuesday 21 January when twenty six of us enjoyed a superb meal and social evening.

I want to briefly mention the work of the Committee you elect each year to mastermind the programme of events, meetings, domestic and Great Western Society, Didcot matters. You will see from the Agenda for this evenings meeting that most of the committee members have a role on which they report each month. We discuss each of the meetings to ensure they live up to the high standard we expect from the presentations. Similarly visits are looked at in terms of support, costs and satisfaction. In doing this we try to avoid disappointments in the future. One of the issues that has taken some time over the past year is "How do we best advertise our Group and its activities". There has been consideration of a Website, using the GWS website, facebook, instagram, Magazines etc. So far we have not been able to come to an agreeable solution but in the meantime we aim to pursue using the GWS website. If any of you have thoughts or ideas on this tricky question of publicising the Group and its activities then please speak to one of the committee members.

Finally it is time to say thank you. To you, whether you are a member, friend or visitor, we are so grateful for your support month after month. It makes the effort put into having an interesting and appealing programme of talks and visits really worth while. Please continue your support and help us publicise the Group through your contacts. Committee members and those who help with the refreshments I thank you for all the work and effort you have put into the running of this Group in the past year.

Stuart Trott

Treasurer's Report

to the 48th Group Annual Meeting 21st February 2020

Income in the last financial year has further declined due to several factors, the main ones being a suspension of Video evenings, the lack of a profit-making Group event, a reduction of the amount received from the sale of second hand books, the non publication of the Group Journal 83B, and the fact that we no longer sell calendars. This latter item means we are no longer involved with the extra work of collecting and accounting for VAT.

Our monthly meetings however continue to be successful both in financial terms and the quality of their content, and for that I thank you, members and friends for continuing to support the Group, and Peter especially for arranging a year-long interesting programme despite occasional cancellation by booked speakers and in the latter case either stepping in himself or arranging others to do so.

This year marks a quarter of a century since I took over as Group Treasurer and I was recently asked to look back and see how much we have donated to Didcot Projects over that time – you may be interested that the donation we intend to make this evening will take that total in excess of £20,000!

Finally my thanks are extended to Norman for continuing to audit the accounts.

David Brabner, Hon Treasurer

Accounts 12 months to January 31st 2020.

INCOME	2019/2020	2018/2019
Sales	0	£233.34
Donations (Sundry)	£55.00	0
Donations (Video Evenings)	£44.00	£110.40
Donations (Sale of Donated books)	£278.00	£430.10
Donations (Tours and Events)	0	£123.50
Meetings Collections	£776.92	£704.92
Meetings Raffle Profit	£196.50	£185.50
VAT collected	0	£46.66
	£1350.42	£1834.42
EXPENDITURE		
Sales Purchases	0	£191.60
Meetings Expenses	£486.00	£477.00
Printing Stationery Postage Etc	£29.46	£6.00
83B Journal printing & Distribution	0	£175.41
Donations to Didcot Projects	£800.00	£500.00
VAT Paid (to GWS Treasurer)	0	£46.66
Sundry Expenses	0	£20.00
	£1315.46	£1416.67

BALANCE SHEET

Brought Forward January 2019	£1598.06	Expenditure 2019/20	£1315.46
Income 2019/2020	£1350.42	Lloyds Bank balance Jan 20	£1633.02
	£2948.48		£2948.48

D.J. Brabner Hon Treasurer
N. Hannaford, Hon Auditor

Douglas and His Famous High Speed Friends

by Chris Penney

The Talylyn Welsh narrow gauge Railway's (Rheilffordd Talylyn) 0-4-0 No 6 *Douglas* was painted in RAF light blue to celebrate the Royal Air Force's 100 years of formation in 2018 as the loco was itself built in 1918. On display to the public at the RAF Cosford Centenary Air Show near Wolverhampton in June 2018, *Douglas* was given a suitable looking handlebar 'moustache.'

A previous RAF employee, the loco operated around the famous Chalshot seaplane and flying boat base at the head of Southampton Water, where a 2ft gauge railway served the sprawling military camp and adjoining pier. The line opened in 1919 and closed in 1946. During the late 1920s RAF Chalshot was the base of the RAF's High Speed Flight formed of racing seaplanes built by the local Supermarine company and designed by R.J.Mitchell who later became famous for the Spitfire. In 1924 the RAF attempted a first round-the-world flight that departed from Chalshot although it was unsuccessful. T. E. Lawrence or Lawrence of Arabia served at the base during his maverick career and he became instrumental in the subsequent development of the RAF's high speed air-sea rescue launches that performed a critical role saving pilots shot down in the Second World War.

RAF Chalshot's "Flight" (as it was known) won the renowned Schneider Trophy for Britain in successive races in 1927, 1929 and 1931. The competition was the foremost aviation

event of its day and Britain hosted the international gathering of seaplane rivals at Chalshot in 1931. Watched by an estimated half a million people from beaches surrounding the Solent's aerial circuit racetrack, an RAF S.6B seaplane won three races in succession setting a new world air speed record of 340 mph. This meant under the rules that Britain had won the competition three times in a row thereby winning the Trophy outright, and had the cup for keeps. Today the impressive Trophy can be viewed in the Science Museum while a replica Trophy and S.6B can be found in Southampton's excellent Solent Sky Museum.

On the occasion of *Douglas*' 2018 unveiling in 'uniform' once again, the RAF's most senior officer in Wales, Air Commodore Williams said: "As the RAF celebrates its centenary in 2018, it is a real privilege to be able to commemorate and celebrate the centenary of an original RAF steam engine from 1918 that is now part of the Talylyn Railway. Whilst the aircraft of the RAF have always tended to grab the attention and the headlines, there is so much more to the RAF and our history. In this RAF centenary year, as we celebrate our creation as the world's first independent Air Force, it is fantastic to work with the Talylyn Railway and recognise the very special connection between this steam engine and the RAF, all the way back to our very first days as an Armed Service."

To an older generation and doubtless some members *Douglas* is familiar as the 2ft 3in gauge loco '*Duncan*' in the Rev Awdry's series of children's storybooks. If *Douglas* could talk he would undoubtedly have a few stories to tell himself about those pioneering days of record breaking flight around the Solent.

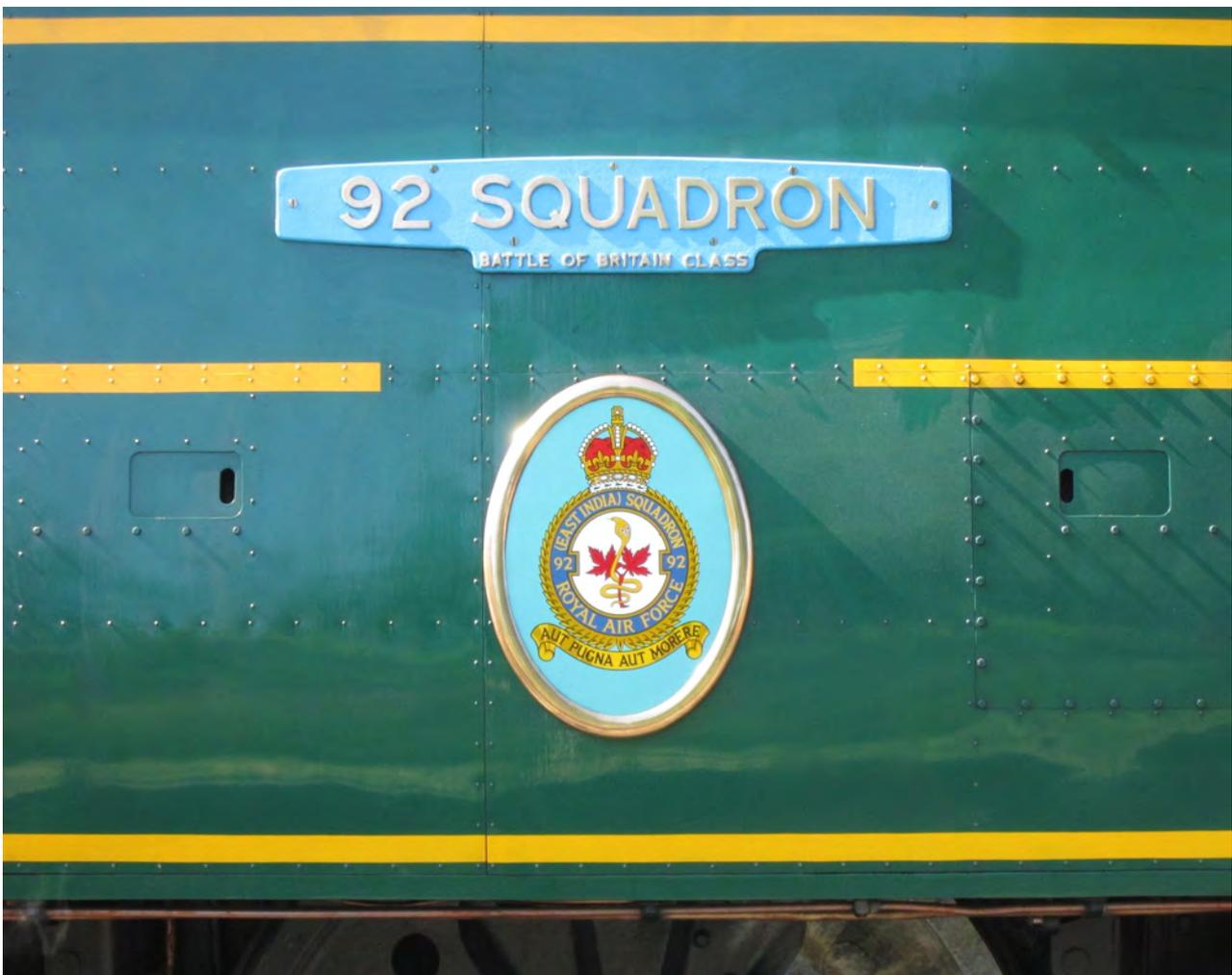




PHOTO: 2018 was definitely the RAF's year! BR Bulleid 4-6-2 Light Pacific 92 Squadron was returned to steam for the RAF's 100th Anniversary celebrations and is seen here visiting the Watercress Line in Hampshire. The Squadron's motto is 'Either fight or die' and the crest features a cobra entwining a sprig of maple leaf. This signifies the association as a Canadian unit during the Great War and of being an East India gift squadron during the Second World War. It won the "Battle of Britain" battle honour in 1940 and today 92 operates as an air staff leadership training squadron without aircraft. Chris Penney.

Sunset on A Different Grange

by Philip Bisatt

Unlike some British people, I don't have friends or relatives living outside the UK in other English-speaking countries, so until 2014, I had not had an opportunity to visit Australia. In that year, however, I was fortunate to join some friends from Cambridge on a trip 'down under'. This turned out to be a very interesting visit, and in many different ways.

In terms of rail travel, I had no real knowledge or expectations of Australian railways, so went with a more or less open mind as to what to see and do. The only thing I really knew was that each Australian state originated as a separate colony of the 'mother country', and each tended to use a different track gauge for their railways – with all that this has since meant in terms of joining up and modernising the network.

After spending a number of days in Sydney, Canberra and Melbourne, travelling between them by rail and road, we reached Adelaide, capital of South Australia. Perhaps less well-known as a city to those based in the UK, it turned out to be an interesting and enjoyable place to visit, not least in terms of its public transport.

We had a ride on the Adelaide 'O-Bahn' guided busway but, as with busways in the UK, remained unconvinced that this was quite the way forward, though admittedly Adelaide presents a rather different context to, say, Cambridge or Luton. Our attraction was more towards the City's tram line (remnant of a once extensive network but, since 2007,



revitalised and extended), and the network of commuter rail services. (Photo 1)

The central Adelaide railway terminus (Photo 2) is a fine building dating from 1928, decidedly American-influenced, as were South Australian Railways at that time. Unfortunately, the platforms were decked over in the 1980s, but the concourse remains impressive. The suburban rail network, branded (along with the City's trams and buses) as the 'Adelaide Metro', is on 5'3" (1600mm) gauge, and routes radiate in several directions from the city centre. Some of



these had recently been electrified, and we sampled the service to Seaford (which also serves a number of other places with Sussex place names, such as Brighton, Hove and Goodwood). (Photo 3)

The new electric trains were certainly very nice, but 'gricing' instincts were more satisfied by the diesel-worked services to Belair, Gawler and Outer Harbor, which at that time were worked by a mixture of class 2000 and 3000 dmus. The



class 2000 diesel-hydraulic railcars (known as 'Jumbos') dated from 1980, and 30 were built by Commonwealth Engineering in Australia under licence from Budd of Philadelphia (with that company's 'kitchen sink' aesthetic). (Photo 4). Since our visit, these units have been withdrawn, but 70 of the 3000 type, which were built in 1987-96, remain in service on the non-electrified Adelaide lines. Also built by Commonwealth Engineering (or Comeng), and also of stainless steel like the 2000s, these units – to my mind, quite handsome – are very different in appearance, and have electric transmission.

Studying the Adelaide Metro network map and timetable, it was impressive to note a combined *off-peak* frequency of a diesel unit every 15 minutes (each way) between Adelaide and the junction station of Woodville, where the branch to Grange diverges from the 'main' line to Outer Harbor. One morning, I therefore took one of the City's trams to its terminus at Entertainment Centre, and walked the short distance from there to the station at Bowden for a spot of observation and photography. This proved well worthwhile, made more agreeable still by the coffee shop in the former station building. (One must, after all, get one's priorities right!)

Before moving on from Adelaide, I resolved to have a trip to Grange itself, to take in its coastal setting on Gulf St Vincent. The Grange branch is only 8 miles long, but has had a complex history, formerly extending further to Henley

Beach, as well as having an additional short branch to Hendon. Until 2009, Grange branch trains also served a station called Cheltenham Racecourse!

I boarded the Grange train at Adelaide railway station, and headed out of the City. It really was glorious weather, with a cloudless sky and the temperature reaching 24 degrees. On arrival at Grange, I wandered from the station via the beach to the 1870s wooden Jetty (pier), where - after the obligatory stroll to the end - I settled down with an iced coffee. I could have been enjoying a perfect English summer day, but it was 21st May in the southern hemisphere, and I was brought back to reality when the daylight started to fade after five o'clock. When the sun touched the sea, I headed back to the station for my train, reflecting that this, surely, was one of those days that I would think back to and remember. (Photo 5).



What's in a Name? The Battle of Britain's Southern Legacy

by Chris Penney

What does the Battle of Britain mean to you? Eighty years on from those chaotic aerial duels of Summer 1940 there are too few of Churchill's "Few" left to tell us what it was really like. To my father, who had his local school closed as a result and home schooling instead (shades of 2020!), it became very real as his memoirs made clear. "After visiting Granny in Willesden we left after dark to catch the train back to Wembley. The whole sky to the East was glowing orange and red from London fires. It unnerved me being away from the safety of home and left me more frightened than any other occasion during wartime." He always subsequently loathed red sky sunsets as a result. To GWR enthusiasts like my father spotting steam in the Greater London area during the late 1940s the battle was perhaps best represented by 5071 *Spitfire*.

My interest in the famous battle began with the 1969 film *Battle of Britain*. In it Lawrence Olivier played RAF Fighter Command head Air Chief Marshal Dowding and Trevor Howard the boss of 11 Group Air Vice Marshal Park. A multitude of well-known actors including Christopher Plummer, Michael Caine and Michael Redgrave represented in some form other RAF officers from 1940. Composer Ron Goodwin's opening score blasts onto TV screens in such dramatic fashion that everyone forgets he originally titled it "Luftwaffe March." In just two hours the film attempts to document the battle's 'chapters' through the eyes of the two

combatants and achieves this very well. To promote the cinema release a postcard set of film scenes was produced and I had some in my childhood scrapbook.

The Battle of Britain is certainly controversial. The Royal Air Force likes to put a convenient start and end date on the combat but in reality this is just to pigeonhole it. The battle arguably started when the Luftwaffe attacked Royal Navy and allied vessels in the Channel rescuing the Army from France. Likewise the deadly nighttime Blitz raids went on well into 1941 and even 1942. There the controversy may have ended but the Southern Railway had other ideas with the naming of their class of Battle of Britain 4-6-2 express locomotives.

Was there actually a locomotive class called the Battle of Britain class? It was a question I asked myself at the 2009 Eastleigh Locomotive Works Centenary celebrations as proudly lined up on display for comparison were a Merchant Navy, a West Country and a Battle of Britain. GWR supporters would undoubtedly argue not while Southern fans would say yes. Both could be right as the Oliver Bulleid -designed 4-6-2 Light Pacifics were in reality West Country class locos given Battle of Britain names and as such called a class by the Southern. The fact these express engines were built was itself controversial as the government banned the manufacture of 'wasteful' express passenger locos during wartime. Bulleid got around this restriction by 'making' the new design (derived from his 'heavy' Merchant Navy class) mixed traffic locos. The government's decision to allow the Southern to build them didn't please the Great Western's "powers that be" at Swindon, whose own plans for a rival design were never followed through due to the austerity of the times.

The technical differences between the Bulleid Pacifics are outside the scope of this article. Suffice to say the West Country class with their lighter loading were designed to operate west of Exeter Central which the Merchant Navy class couldn't. This was because of the restriction over the former LSWR Meldon Viaduct at Oakhampton. During their construction it became apparent the West Country class wasn't to be restricted to Somerset, Devon or Padstow duties. Not shy of a publicity stunt the Southern decided to capitalise on the 1940 Battle of Britain having been fought mainly over its territory. Therefore a 'new' class with names associated with the RAF and some, but not all, of the battle's locations was thought up.

Production of the 40 odd members of the Battle of Britain class was undertaken in both the Southern and British Rail eras and this certainly benefits scale modellers depicting the changeover period. As the Battle of Britain (according to the RAF) only took place in four short months between July and October 1940 the Southern should have had a relatively easy task in selecting suitable names for the new class. But by deciding to limit the geographical spread of names chosen for the Battle of Britains to just South East territory (rather than Kent to Cornwall) they contrived to make some glaring and very obvious omissions from the battle's history.



PHOTO: The Defiant fighter along with the Beaufighter, Blenheim and Gladiator fought in the battle but none of these types made it onto the list of names remembered by the Southern's Bulleid class. The Defiant did however get its name on GWR Castle 5080!

Chris Penney

To start with the battle involved airmen of the two aggressors, Germany and Italy, taking on the combined strength of those from not only the UK but aircrew from 15 other nations, British Empire dominions, colonies and overseas dependent territories. Over one hundred Polish Air Force pilots came to Britain to carry on the struggle for their invaded homeland. An RAF Hurricane squadron of Poles flew from RAF Northolt (in GWR territory) and operated over London, Surrey and Hampshire (Southern Railway territory) during the battle. They achieved remarkable success by making head on attacks aimed at killing the enemy bomber pilots. By the time the Southern created the class in 1945 Polish RAF involvement was scandalously ignored by the UK Government to appease the Soviet Union who occupied Poland at the war's end. Britain had gone to war over Poland and more Poles served in RAF Fighter Command during the Battle of Britain than any other country. Yet the

RAF's highest scoring squadron in the battle – the Polish 303 Squadron – didn't get a loco name.

The Royal Navy, in the shape of the Fleet Air Arm, loaned pilots to the RAF during the battle and provided supporting aircraft ground crews. Royal Naval Air Stations on the South Coast were regular targets for the Luftwaffe's bombers as they mistook them for frontline RAF fighter airfields. Indeed on 18th August – considered by historians the busiest day of fighting in the summer-long battle – the worst air raid casualties occurred at RNAS Ford in West Sussex. The Fleet Air Arm had only just become independent of RAF control when Britain declared war on Germany in September 1939. Nine of their 57 pilots who wore dark blue and flew alongside the RAF during the 1940 battle were killed and a loco should have been named in their honour. It goes without saying interservice rivalry doubtless lay behind the decision to omit any acknowledgment of these brave naval aviators.

Certain military commands that oversaw the battle were honoured by the class but others that also participated, such as RAF Bomber Command, were not. From an RAF viewpoint it would never have done to have had a loco named after such a 'rival' to Fighter Command. RAF Balloon Command, which did such work to protect high value targets with barrage balloons, also wasn't recognised. On the civilian side 34050 *Royal Observer Corps* is a noteworthy inclusion. Of the RAF's six fighter aircraft types used in the battle only the Hurricane and Spitfire are represented within the class.

Also featured were the names of the two most prominent RAF Group commanders. To Battle of Britain aficionados



PHOTO: 34053 *Sir Keith Park* takes the name of the New Zealander who commanded Fighter Command's 11 Group area. It consisted of seven Sector airfields in the South and South East that provided the defence of London. When 34053 returned to steam on the SVR in 2013 the ceremony was attended by the New Zealand High Commissioner and included a RAF Spitfire salute. *Chris Penney*

the name *Sir Trafford Leigh-Mallory* given BR Bulleid 34109 is perhaps the most controversial. He commanded 12 Group designated to defend the industrial Midlands while Keith Park's 11 Group watched over London and the South East. There's an insightful scene in the 1969 movie when 11 Group's Keith Park (played by Trevor Howard) says: "*Worse! Kenley and Biggin Hill [airfields] are a shambles again – and the rest aren't much better – all because 12 Group didn't do their stuff. Leigh-Mallory and his big wings...they may as*



PHOTO: 34053 *Sir Keith Park* takes the name of the New Zealander who commanded Fighter Command's 11 Group area. It consisted of seven Sector airfields in the South and South East that provided the defence of London. When 34053 returned to steam on the SVR in 2013 the ceremony was attended by the New Zealand High Commissioner and included a RAF Spitfire salute.

Photo: Chris Penney.

well stay on the ground for all the use they are." It refers to the different combat tactics employed by the two Group commanders during the battle. Leigh-Mallory's 12 Group responsibilities lay well north of the Thames but his squadrons were ordered to fly south to aid hard-pressed 11 Group as required. Built in 1950 34109's nameplate hardly met the parameters of the Southern's original definition for the class (of representing the South East), but by that date the Southern Railway was itself history.

The 4-6-2 Battle of Britains were completed between 1945 and 1950. Back then loco naming policy would also have been governed by wartime secrecy otherwise surely "Chain Home," to acknowledge the RAF's vital radar stations, and "Bletchley Park," to recognise the wartime code-breakers, would undoubtedly of featured among the class.

Only one RAF Victoria Cross was awarded during the battle. This action involving Flight Lieutenant Nicolson took place over Southampton Water on 16th August 1940. He'd been scrambled from RAF Boscombe Down in Wiltshire. By restricting the RAF airfields nominated for loco names to just six locations in Sussex, Surrey and Kent it prevented any recognition of those in Hampshire, Wiltshire, Dorset and Devon that were also on the frontline during the battle. This included RAF Warmwell protecting Portland naval base and Weymouth and where later, during 1941, my uncle served as ground crew to 402 (French Canadian) Squadron flying Hurricanes. In pursuing this South East only naming policy for the Battle of Britains the Southern were doubtless aware of the PR conflict of interest with the West Country class. The irony was that by the BR Western Region era you were as lightly to see a Battle of Britain at Exeter St David's as a West Country.

The style of nameplate designed for the class is interesting to note. Painted Air Force light blue they are shaped to represent the wing of an aircraft, although with straight ends

they are very unlike any Spitfire or Hurricane of the 1940 period. Also featured is an heraldic crest. Depending on the RAF name type given this is either the RAF crest or one representing the station, squadron or family as appropriate.

The reality of the 1940 battle was bought home to me from a



PHOTO: We will remember them. One of the Battle of Britain's "Few" in a Hampshire parish churchyard. Photo: Chris Penney.

young age. Nearby the railway line that's close to the Rev Awdry's Hampshire birthplace where I grew up is North Baddesley parish church. There lies RAF Wing Commander J S Dewar – the most senior ranked officer killed in the battle. To this day his death is surrounded in mystery and controversy. Three days before what subsequently became known as Battle of Britain Day on 15th September 1940 he was flying a lone Hurricane from RAF Exeter to Tangmere in West Sussex. He was never seen again until his bullet-riddled body later washed up on the Sussex coast. There are no recorded witnesses to his death. An RAF ace having destroyed five Nazi aircraft he commanded 87 Squadron. His squadron was not one honoured in the naming of the Battle of Britain class of Southern Pacifics.

Battle of Britain Class RAF Nameplates

Name Type	Names
RAF Commands	Fighter Command
RAF Commanders	Lord Dowding, Sir Trafford Leigh-Mallory, Sir Keith Park
RAF Fighter Aircraft	Hurricane, Spitfire
RAF Personnel Role	Fighter Pilot
RAF Squadrons	17, 25, 41, 46, 66, 73, 74, 92, 141, 145, 213, 219, 222, 229, 249, 253, 257, 264
RAF Stations	Biggin Hill, Croydon, Hawkinge, Kenley, Manston, Tangmere
Auxiliary Squadrons	501, 601, 602, 603, 605, 615

The 1940 Norton Fitzwarren Derailment, by David Hartland

At 3.45am on Monday 4th November 1940, two trains were proceeding west from Taunton. The 12.50am Paddington to Penzance newspaper train was on the Down Main, with clear signals all the way to Wellington and beyond. On the Down Relief line was the overnight 9.50pm Paddington to Penzance sleeper, with clear signals only as far as Norton Fitzwarren. Beyond here the two lines converged into one, and the sleeper was signalled to stop. It did not stop, however, and just as the newspaper train was overtaking, the driver realised he had been looking at the wrong set of signals, and braked, but it was too late and the train derailed on the facing trap points. Twenty-seven people, including the fireman, were killed. The newspaper train had just overtaken the sleeper, but if it had been running just a few seconds later it would have crashed into the wreckage. The Inquiry found the driver to blame, and many written accounts have been published since then about the circumstances of the accident and the blame on the driver. But there is now a different story to tell.....

For many years I knew Jack Gardner well through a mutual involvement in model engineering. Jack had started as a cleaner in Taunton in 1934 and became fireman, then driver, shed foreman and eventually area controller. We discussed the Norton Fitzwarren crash on several occasions. He had a meticulous memory, and was intimately aware of the details of the Taunton layout from the point of view of both drivers and signalmen. He retained clear memories of the days and weeks after the accident, where there was a general feeling of unease among Taunton staff that the investigation was not bringing out all the facts, and even when the report was published there remained doubts. (The report was in an abbreviated typed form, due to wartime restrictions; there are no diagrams or photographs as appear in reports written before and since that time. **(Ref 1)**). The principal question of course concerned the behaviour of Driver Stacey. It was clear that a driver on that particular section of track, with parallel main and relief lines, once on the move, could be reading the wrong set of signals. (Jack himself confessed to two such mistakes in his own driving career elsewhere on the GWR, one of which he published in his book **(Ref 2)**). On that night in 1940 both routes west of Taunton were clear, and both were showing green lights. Several writers have pointed out the difficulties of working trains in blackout conditions, and the difficulty of observing signals, and this is often quoted as the reason why the driver mistook his route and caused the crash. In fact, with virtually no extraneous lights showing, the glow from signal lamps was very much clearer than normal. The handicap of course was the blackout shutters and curtains on the cabs which required a definite effort in looking out. But the signals themselves were clearly visible.

Whereas misreading signals on the move was explainable, the fact that Driver Stacey watched a signal change from red to green, and looked a second time in the next 13 minutes while his train was in the platform, and misread this on both occasions (even if he had to lift the blackout curtain) - this was much more difficult to accept. At the Inquiry the

inspecting Officer questioned him closely and in spite of his clear report, Driver Stacey was judged to have misread the signals, and he was put onto shunting duties and died a few months later, presumably believing he had caused the accident.

In the written accounts of that night which have appeared since the formal report., there are several errors which have been perpetuated, notably the idea that Driver Stacey went to protect his train by rushing back through floodwater to Silk Mill Crossing. (see for example **ref 3,4 and 5**). This is quite wrong. The proper reaction when both lines are blocked is not to protect the train in rear – the guard and the signalling system should attend to this - but to see to the opposite line, where a train may be approaching unaware of the blockage. It was natural therefore that Driver Stacey headed for Victory Crossing, one mile to the west, and this is reported as so in the Inquiry.

As for the floodwater that the driver is supposed to have waded through – the line here is on an embankment! As Amyas Crump has pointed out, the driver may have been soaked by the contents of the locomotive tender which had overturned. **(Ref 6)**. John Heaton suggested in 2007 that there might have been other events which had contributed to the disaster.**(Ref.7)**.

In the early 1990's Jack Gardner told me about a secret he had kept for over 40 years. In 1946, Jack had talked to Jim Wadham, who had been the West Station signalman at the time of the crash, but by 1946 he was near retirement and working West Loop signal box. He was also a Taunton Magistrate. This conversation suggested that the conclusions about the crash were wrong. Jack and I discussed whether this story should be made public and we felt that since the signalman, the driver and everyone else connected with the accident were now dead, it did not seem to matter. He published the story in his book *Cleaner to Controller* in 1992 **(Ref 2)** with the help and encouragement of Simon Bowditch. Yet more years have passed and Jack himself has died so perhaps it is time for a wider audience to know the truth.

Jim Wadham confessed to Jack that he HAD cleared No3 signal for the Sleeper to cross from relief to Down Main, and some minutes later, once he knew of the running of the Newspaper train, changed the route, *but failed to ensure that the driver understood the change*. (The rules do allow a signalman to change the route for a train, but he should have left both signals at Danger, and waited for the driver to blow his whistle – then the alternative signal could be lowered). **He had lied to the Inspecting officer at the Inquiry.**

Once the sleeper train was on the move, it was then understandable for Driver Stacey to fail to notice he had not negotiated the crossover and was on the down relief line following the wrong set of signals. He was mistaking his position on the track.

It is worth adding that the method of working at Taunton West Station box was unchanged even up to the end of semaphore signalling in 1986. All important down trains used the Down Relief Platform, No.1. This was because all the main services for the station were on this platform - Refreshment Room, Stationmaster's office, and Telegraph Office. Using this platform also avoided passengers having



Photo: The view west from the Down Relief platform at Taunton, taken 1st January 1979 after heavy snowfall. The bracket signal from left to right is Down Relief to loco shed, Down Relief Home No.10, Down Relief to Down Main No.3. It was signals 10 and 3 which Driver Stacey was blamed for confusing. On the right is the Down Main Home No.2, moved back from its former position beyond the signal box. In the distance is the gantry, with relief line signals to the left, main line signals to the right. The track and signalling layout is virtually unchanged since 1940 except for the removal of the distant arms after the closure of West Junction Signal Box. *David Hartland*

to use the subway to reach the town. Trains departing from Platform 1 would be put over directly to the Down Main, allowing them a fast acceleration route on the main past West Junction, Silk Mill and Norton Fitzwarren, and on up the gradient to Whiteball. To send trains on the Relief line meant them negotiating a crossover either at Silk Mill or at Norton, both of restricted speed; hence crossing over at West Station saved time for the train.

The result was that the Down Relief line west of Taunton was really only used for Minehead and Barnstaple trains and trains using the Goods avoiding lines. The crossover at Taunton West was usually left in the reversed position, set for the Down Main, and only changed when needed for shunting or if a 'flyer' was due on the Down Main. The numbering of the signals was significant – No.2 for the Down Main home, No.3 for the Down Main to Down Relief and No.10 further along the lever frame, suggesting a move of lesser importance, for the Down Relief. **See figure 1.**

There is a good view of these signals when running into Taunton, for the driver, but the view is not so clear with a long train in the platform where the locomotive may be close to the bracket signal. The West Station signalman may alter the crossover and pull 3 or 10 without having achieved line clear from West Junction for either route. With the crossover set and No.3 pulled, the train would be free to start from the platform and pull forward (allowing another train to enter behind in the platform) and wait at the starting signal on the gantry, which of course was locked awaiting line clear from Taunton West Junction.

Signalman Wadham at the Inquiry stated that he had to reverse the crossover prior to the Sleeper train arriving, for a locomotive to enter the shed, and a study of the locking chart for the frame in Taunton West Station (**ref 8**) confirms that for a loco to enter the shed the crossover must be set to the straight-ahead position. After the locomotive move, the crossover could have been left where it was, towards the Down Relief; or it could have been put back to its normal position, towards the Down Main. What happened to this crossover at this moment decided the responsibility for the crash. The driver stated in the Inquiry that he arrived at 3.30 am and that one minute after arriving in the platform he looked out and saw the signal No.3 come off, directing his train to the Down Main. This is entirely consistent with the normal operating practice, as has already been said, and signalman Wadham could have done this perfectly normally before asking the road from West Junction. Jack Gardner in his book has a footnote that Wadham must have obtained line clear for this and it would have been entered in the Register – this is not correct; no register entry would have been required at this stage for the departing train.

At this point Wadham rang Athelney east of Cogload to find that the 12.50 Paddington to Penzance Newspaper train, one which was paramount not to be delayed, was running slightly early. Wadham thought about the timings and realised that putting the Sleeper out onto the down main would delay the Newspapers behind. At the Inquiry he stated that the crossover was still set for the Down Relief and he signalled the train on that route by pulling off signal 10. The Inspector asked him at the Inquiry did he at any time pull off no.3 and he denied it, stating that No.10 was the only signal cleared for the train.

On departure, as the Sleeper passed under the bracket

signal, there was a moment where the signals were clearer to the Fireman, and Fireman Seabridge could have looked out at this moment. Had he done so, he would have seen signal 10 off and realised the train was on the Relief. The fireman died in the crash, however.

There is one other point. In the Inquiry the inspecting officer noted that the signalling was unusual and there was a hint, taken up by several writers later on, that the signalling layout was partly to blame for the accident. The fact is that the signalling at Taunton was upgraded in the 1950's with steel

posts replacing the former timber dolls, but the layout of signals to the west, and in particular the position of signals on the gantry at Taunton West down starters, was unchanged, and remained in this layout (with some simplification) up until 1986. But it may be that the GWR signalling department was nervous about the whole issue, and felt that they had to study the situation in great detail. One change was made, and that was the position of the Down Main Home at Taunton West (No.2). Originally this was a bracket signal to the west of the signal box, to give visibility on the curve, but in 1953 (**Ref 8**) this signal was moved back to the platform side of West Station Box. It may be that the original position of this signal was such that a train in a specific position in the down relief platform could lead the driver to confuse the original bracket signal with the gantry beyond.

Norton Fitzwarren continues to fascinate writers because the circumstances were so unusual, and the GWR narrowly missed having a much more serious accident had the newspaper train run into the wreckage of the sleeper. But the greatest fascination is that the Inquiry came to the wrong conclusion because Jim Wadham, a Taunton Magistrate, withheld the true account of his actions on that night, and left the driver taking all the blame. It is time that the record was corrected, if only for the family of Driver Stacey, who died continuing to believe he caused the accident.

REFERENCES

Ref 1: MOT Report on the Norton Fitzwarren accident dated 7 December 1940.

Ref 2: *Cleaner to Controller*, by W.J.Gardner, The Oakwood Press 1992 ISBN 0 85361 445

Ref 3: *Red for Danger* by LTC Rolt, various editions.

Ref 4: *British Railway Accidents of the Twentieth Century* by J.A.B.Hamilton, George Allen and Unwin, 1962.

Ref 5: *SPAD and derailment at Norton Fitzwarren*, by Greg Morse, Great Western Echo, Sumer 2019.

Ref 6: Amyas Crump letter to the Great Western Echo Autumn 2019.

Ref 7: *New Light on the Norton Fitzwarren Disaster*, John Heaton, Railway Magazine June 2007.

Ref 8: Locking Chart records for Taunton West Station Signal box, available from the Signalling Record Society website.

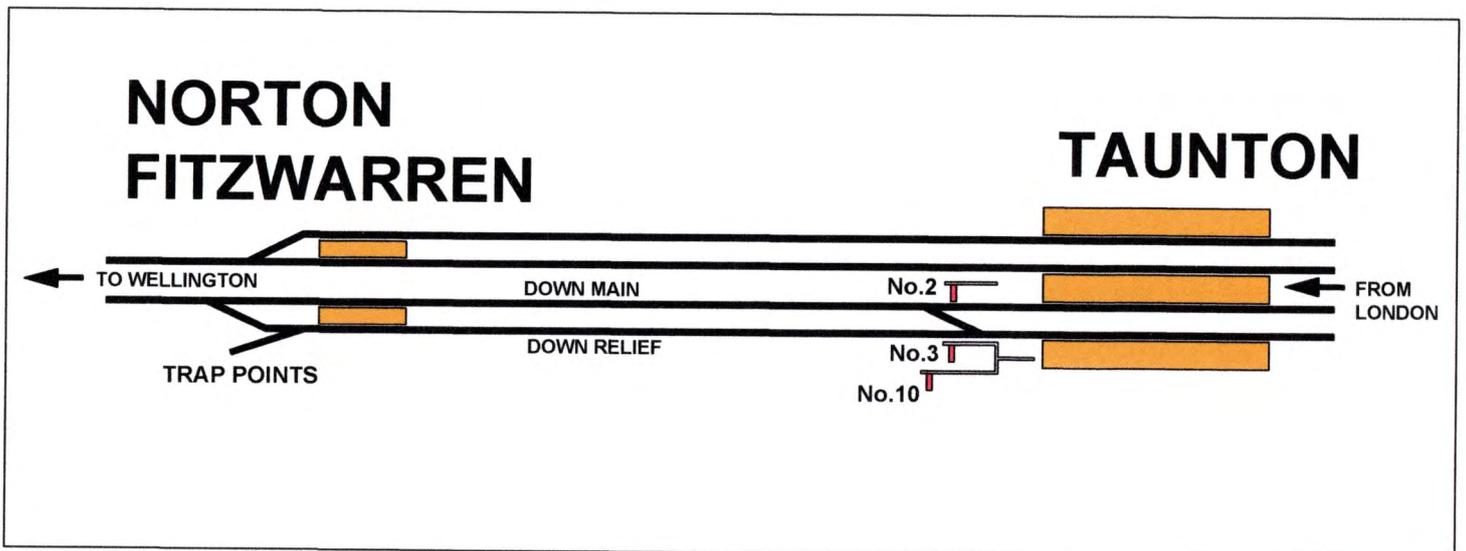


Figure 1.
 This shows a simplified track layout between Taunton and Norton Fitzwarren with the key signals outlined. The derailment occurred at the Trap Points to the west of the platforms at Norton Fitzwarren station.



Photo: An up Ballast train headed by a class 47 locomotive passes the former Norton Fitzwarren station site in December 1980. The station hotel is to the right, and the actual derailment point is on the left, near the end of the ballast road which follows the route of the down relief line. Note the twin brake vans and two brake tenders in the consist, to help provide brake force for this heavy train, which probably is otherwise unfitted, with no continuous brakes on the ballast wagons themselves.

David Hartland.

The Passenger

This poem first appeared in the second issue of 83B in January 1980. The author was unknown at that stage and after 40 years the mystery remains as to who penned these lines...

A heavy West of England train,
Was signalled for the old Down Main,
Provided with a special path,
Via Reading, Didcot, Swindon, Bath.
Just on the move, a man got in.
His face looked drawn, but firm of chin.
He wore an open, friendly smile,
With clothes cut in an older style.

"This station does not change at all –
I recognise the booking hall.
There's Westbourne Park and Old Oak Shed,
With Southall coming up ahead.
Ten Eights I see she's loaded to,
No slip these days, they all go through.
They run them hard, both fast and freight,
But no doubt they can take the weight."

He spoke as though he must have seen
Some railway service. Could have been
A guard or driver now retired,
With knowledge long ago acquired.
"Ah, Reading's changed" he spoke again,
"And there's the Thames by Scours Lane".
Her peered out as we gently slowed,
Clearly familiar with the road.

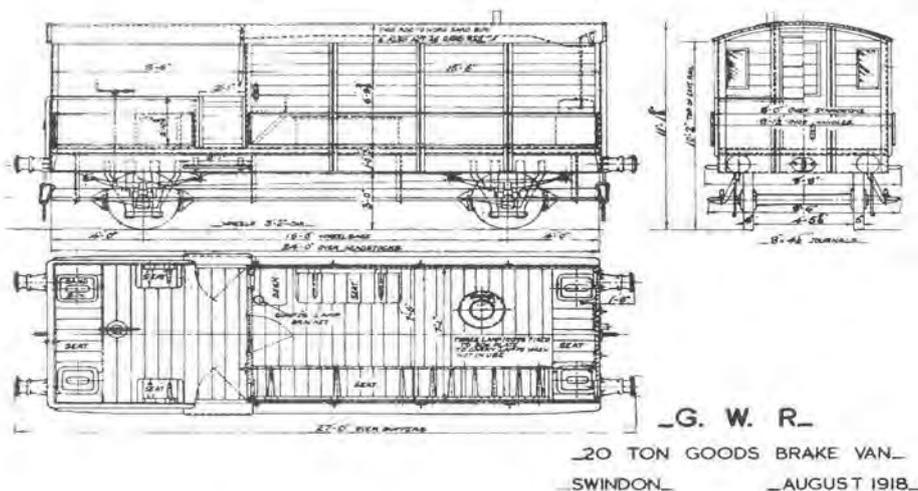
We picked up speed and soon had passed
Through Didcot station travelling fast,
Then Steventon and Challow, 'til,
At Swindon we were gaining still.
"Amazing how the works have spread,
From what we started with," he said.
I wondered who this man could be,
Who spoke with such authority.

We whistled for the road at Box,
And plunged beneath the fissured rocks.
"They said I'd never get through this,"
His voice came from the dark abyss.
"It took five years of toil and sweat,
Until the day the headings met.
We cut through straight without a bend,
She's two miles long from end to end."

At Temple Meads he leaned my way
And pointed to the Midland Bay.
"That was the old Great Western Line
Way back in eighteen thirty-nine."
With time in hand and rising speed,
He said "We're moving now, indeed".
Through Taunton, Exeter we ran,
Neared Saltash with its mighty span.

And with the Tamar far below,
"This was my greatest work, you know".
He spoke again "But who are you?"
I asked, "If what you say is true?"
An empty goods stood in the yard,
As he produced his business card.
I took it from his outstretched hand,
And rapidly its legend scanned.

When I looked up I knew there'd be
No-one else around but me.
Hallucination must have been
The cause of all I'd heard and seen.
I still retained the printed card
He'd offered me – as I stared hard.
The fine engraving, neat and clear,
Said: "**I.K. Brunel, Engineer**".



The Beginnings of the Taunton Group

In 1969 The Great Western Society was based in the South West, with rolling stock being collected at Totnes. Three members in the Taunton area decided that it would be worth forming a local group and on 24th July 1969 the first meeting was held, in the Phoenix Hotel, Taunton. Eighty people came, and there were drinks and supper laid on. The organisation was formed as a division of the South West Group.

Three months later, a second meeting was held in the skittle alley of the King's Arms with 60 people attending, and it was resolved to purchase an ex-GWR 45xx or 52/72XX locomotive for restoration at Taunton.

During 1970 activities started in earnest, with large attendances at meetings, trips to Newton Abbot and the Dart Valley Railway, and working parties at Barry Scrapyard on locomotive 5572, which was the choice for restoration at Taunton. An exhibition in the Albemarle Hall in October 1970 had the valve gear from 5572 on show, and at the same period the restoration depot was set up in the Taunton locomotive shed with a further locomotive, 'Ponteberem' and a TOAD 950592 arriving.

On 2nd January 1971 the division organised a Last Daylight run on the MInehead line, followed by the arrival of Breakdown Vans No.1 and No.56 for restoration. Such was the level of support in Taunton that it was decided to form the division into a separate fully fledged Group of the Society and this took place in May 1971.



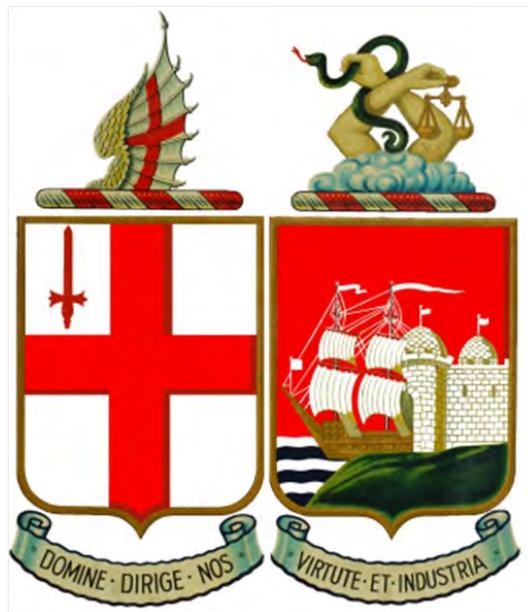
PHOTO: Car Window sticker from 1971.

It is interesting that this should feature the outline of Brunel's bridge rail as it was the discovery of large quantities of this material seven years later that would lead to the Taunton Group Broad Gauge Project.

The year 2021 will therefore be the fiftieth anniversary of the Taunton Group!

On 8th August 1971 the locomotive 5572 left Barry Scrapyard by rail on its own wheels and was brought through the Severn Tunnel to Taunton. In subsequent years the Group carried out a partial restoration on this and the other locomotives, as well as the Toad, Auto Trailer 92, and other items of rolling stock before the depot closed in July 1985 and all the equipment was moved to Didcot.

The Taunton Group was not out of work, however, because in 1978 a large quantity of ex-broad gauge track materials was discovered at Burlescombe leading to the Broad Gauge Project at Didcot....



TAUNTON GROUP EVENING MEETINGS PROGRAMME 2021

Meetings are held on the third Friday of each month, throughout the year,
at Stoke St Mary Village Hall, near Taunton. TA3 5DE (unless otherwise indicated)
commencing at 19.30, and all are welcome.

January to March: NO MEETINGS

Friday 16 April	‘Yet more Railway Tales’	David Hartland
Friday 21 May	‘A Look at Slow Trains’	David Peel
Friday 18 June	‘Railways of Kent & East Sussex’	Chris Ralls
Friday 16 July	‘The Great Train Robbery’	Ian Boskett
Friday 20 Aug	‘Members Present’ compiled by	Francis Lewis
Friday 17 September	‘Echoes of Steam’	Simon Foote
Friday 15 October	‘Exploits of a Retired Anorak’	Ashley Thorne
Friday 5 November	‘Railway Video Highlights’ <i>This meeting will be at Rockwell Green Parish Church Hall, TA21 9DH</i>	David Brabner
Friday 19 November	‘Bridgwater to Blue Anchor’	Peter Triggs
Friday 17 December	‘My Kind of Wales’	Francis Lewis

We very much hope that these meetings can proceed, but this does depend on the virus restrictions at the time. We will keep everyone updated on the situation.