

North Cheshire

Rail Users' Group



Monitoring rail services from Chester & Ellesmere Port via Helsby, Frodsham & Runcorn to Liverpool & Manchester

Newsletter June 2013

* * * * *

FROM THE CHAIR

After 20 years of being shut up and neglected, Frodsham station house is poised to start a new life. Fitting out in the two units created and other work is going on at a frantic pace and on Sunday (2nd June) two different contractors were working in the house while United Utilities were busy in the station drive sorting out the water supply. The scene was quite chaotic particularly at the junction of the drive and Church Street when traffic was trying to get in and out of Morrison's supermarket. The 'stop – go man' was having a tough time!

In the spring, we heard the news that at least one of the units had been let to a local established hairdresser *Frazar James* who wished to re-locate to the station from their 1960's premises. Fitting out is currently in progress in the unit which incorporates the courtyard. This unique feature will be used as an outdoor area where customers and staff can relax in a calm atmosphere, surrounded by plants and climbers.

On meeting them for the first time, it was obvious that the new tenants (Simon and Jan) were conscious of the history and heritage of Frodsham station and the house and very appreciative of the garden immediately outside. Additionally, they will be mounting old pictures of the station in the salon and they gratefully accepted an offer of some of the plaques won by Frodsham in the 'Cheshire Best Kept Station' competition, for display in the courtyard. They also indicated that staff and customers were excited about the new location and looking forward to the imminent move.

However, as far as events are concerned, the focus this year is on Helsby station and the Helsby - Hooton line. Work is coming to an end on the station building and hopefully, the boards will be removed in time for events celebrating the 150th anniversary of Helsby station on 6th July. We are working with Network Rail to see if it is possible to have the house open for a short time on the day so that rail enthusiasts and the local community can have an opportunity to see round the building as happened at Frodsham last year. The line from Helsby to Hooton is also 150 years old and other stations will be joining in the festivities. In the early afternoon, there will be an opportunity to make a through journey from Hooton, via Helsby and Frodsham, to Liverpool South Parkway and Liverpool Lime Street.

So it's not a double header event this year, it's a triple whammy!

I look forward to seeing as many of our supporters as possible on the day.

Janet Briggs, Chairman

HOOTON TO HELSBY 150 YEAR CELEBRATIONS - SATURDAY 6TH JULY 2013

Northern Rail, Merseyrail and Arriva Trains Wales (ATW) will, in conjunction with Cheshire West and Cheshire Council (CWAC) and the North Cheshire Rail Users Group (NCRUG), be operating a special train to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the opening of the Hooton to Helsby line. Travel on this special train will enable the Public Service over Unusual Lines (PSUL) track at Helsby Junction to be traversed as well as the through lines at Ellesmere Port. This is a rare opportunity, particularly for enthusiasts, to travel over these lines.

In addition events will take place at Little Sutton, Ellesmere Port and Helsby stations. NCRUG are organising the Helsby station events which will include a miniature steam engine on a short section of track and the unveiling of a celebratory plaque which will come from the Llechwedd Slate Quarries at Blaenau Ffestiniog from where the original slate roof on the station buildings came. As mentioned elsewhere in this newsletter the garden at the Warrington end of Platform 1 has been completely renovated following years of neglect due to heavy remedial work having to be undertaken. This work was beyond the capabilities of NCRUG volunteers as special equipment was required. We are grateful to ATW and Network Rail for their contributions which has enabled our volunteers to move in and attend to the garden.

The Parliamentary train this year will start from Liverpool Lime Street, on Saturday 6th July 2013, and will depart at a more civilised hour, namely 09.42. A special feature of this train is that, in addition to starting from Lime Street, it will operate a shuttle service between Helsby and Hooton before returning via Halton curve to Liverpool South Parkway and Lime Street. For timings see page 4. Fares will be in the region of £10 (for the day) and we understand, will be able to be purchased on the train.

A vintage bus service and a new Stagecoach bus will also operate between Helsby and Ellesmere Port in the afternoon; from Helsby at 13.35; 14.05; 15.00; 16.30; and from Ellesmere Port at 13.00; 13.25; 14.15; 14.45 (times are provisional), for which donations will be sought.

Normal booked services on Halton Curve and Helsby to Ellesmere Port will also run on this day.

We look forward to seeing as many of you as possible on the day not only because we hope it will be a happy occasion, but also because it will boost our message to the stakeholders about the importance of Halton curve re-instatement and the provision of a decent service on the Ellesmere Port/Helsby line.

Please contact johnhobbs@aol.com for further information.

JH/CWG

WHAT'S ALL THIS ABOUT HEALTH & SAFETY?

A member of our committee, who shall be nameless, when first married, lived in south Manchester and worked in Liverpool. These days that is nothing unusual but in 1959, it was.

The daily commute was made by train from Manchester Central, yes – Central, to Liverpool Central along the CLC line via Warrington. The rolling stock, hauled by steam locomotives of various types, consisted of six or eight compartment type carriages with slam doors and strap operated windows. Please forgive the lack of technical expertise in these descriptions as the writer, at that time, was not knowledgeable about such matters. Nevertheless, it is hoped readers will be able to conjure up a picture of the scene at that time.

The journey started early in order to be at the place of employment in Royal Liver Building, Liverpool, by 9.00am sharp with few excuses accepted, if late. Over a period of time one tended to travel with the same people each morning and the rear compartment of the last carriage of the train, occupied by the writer, became one of considerable mirth and camaraderie.

This proved to be extremely beneficial to the writer who often found himself with about 2 minutes to get from Peter Street, up the long cobbled ramp leading to the station, onto the concourse and then the platform, before the train departed. Trains always seemed to depart on time which was unfortunate as a couple of minutes delay would have been very much appreciated by this passenger.

Being young and extremely fit, (having recently been on Her Majesty's service in the RAF), and in possession of a season ticket, it was a common sight to see a smartly suited gentleman, (some may disagree with the 'gentleman' description), complete with brief case, running up the ramp, avoiding other travellers on the concourse and then, on one extreme occasion, actually leaping over the ticket barrier flashing his season ticket in the face of a bewildered ticket collector. By this time the train had started its slow progress down the platform but the door of the last compartment was open and a hand extended out to grab the writer's hand and haul him into the compartment. Prior to this the briefcase was hurled into the compartment and whoever caught it was given a cheer. The train was usually roaring through Urmston before the late arrival had regained sufficient breath to thank his 'saviour' for his help in preventing him incurring the wrath of his employer.

Needless to say, and thankfully, this could not happen today. Manchester Central is no longer a railway station, carriage doors are firmly shut and locked before departure, today's ticket barriers are higher and more substantial, the writer can only just manage to put one foot in front of the other let alone jump a barrier and, finally, Health & Safety has become an extremely diligent, if not always appreciated, industry.

The above tells the story of an extremely reckless and stupid activity which, fortunately, could not happen today and which both the writer and NCRUG does not recommend under any circumstances.

CWG

A STRANGE INCIDENT

In 1965 – or was it '66, I was asked by my employer to go to Spain, to inspect, and learn about, some equipment used in an oilfield in northern Spain. This entailed flying to Madrid, and making a rail journey to Burgos, some 250 km north of Madrid. The coaches of that train were Talgo units, articulated with a single pair of wheels between each coach. They are relatively small coaches compared to the size of the locomotive.

At the end of my ten day stay in Burgos I joined a train heading some 150 km north east to Bilbao, where I was scheduled to visit a shipyard. The coaches on this train were conventional corridor stock. The route passed through mountainous country, and the weather was becoming progressively worse, the skies going very dark followed by thunder and lightning and torrential rain.

I was sitting on my own in a first class compartment, when I heard two or three bangs, each louder than the previous, when the loudest bang of all came directly above me. A hole at least a foot across was punched into the roof bringing in the rain and also a cloud of dust, which was presumably asbestos dust from the roof insulation.

The train came to an abrupt halt and within a few minutes the guard appeared in the corridor, followed by a crowd of passengers, all trying to see this English apparition covered in dust!

I was moved into another compartment, and after twenty minutes or so the train continued to Bilbao. It transpired that the storm had broken a telegraph pole at its base, and left the pole hanging on its wires over the track. The electric locomotive had then hit the pole, knocking it upwards, until it fell

back and hit another coach, and then successively further coaches down the train, all the time the impact diminishing.

No damage done to me, fortunately, and apart from having a good shower at the hotel and a lot of brushing required to my suit all ended well.

The return journey was without incident!

BW

TRAIN TIMINGS FOR THE HOOTON to HELSBY LINE 150 YEARS' CELEBRATIONS

The timings for the train on 6th July are:-

Liverpool Lime Street		0942	
Warrington Bank Quay		1012	
Frodsham		1023	
Helsby	arr.	1029	
	dep.	1035	1210
Ince and Elton		1038	1213
Stanlow and Thornton		1041	1216
Ellesmere Port	arr.	1047	1220
	dep.	1053	1223
Overpool		1057	1227
Little Sutton		1100	1230
Hooton		1109	1238
Hooton		1137	1307
Little Sutton		1142	1312
Overpool		1145	1314
Ellesmere Port	arr.	1148	1317
	dep.	1149	1318
Stanlow and Thornton		1154	1322
Ince and Elton		1157	1325
Helsby		1202	1330
			1332
Frodsham			1337
Runcorn			1346
Liverpool South Parkway			1355
Liverpool Lime Street			1407

Tickets will be a special day ranger ticket available from ticket offices retailing at approx £10 but details still to be confirmed.

The shuttle services shown above between Helsby and Hooton will be supplemented by a Vintage bus and new Stagecoach bus between Helsby and Ellesmere Port in the afternoon from Helsby at 13.35; 14.05; 15.00; 16.30; and from Ellesmere Port at 13.00; 13.25; 14.15; 14.45 (times provisional). No fares will apply to the bus service but donations, on the day, will be appreciated.

SB/CWG

DERAILMENT AT HALTON JUNCTION

In 1967, whilst waiting for a new house to be built, I was fortunate to be living with my wife's parents in Malpas Road, Runcorn. The garden of this property backed onto the Crewe to Liverpool line opposite

Halton Junction. This enabled me to view activities on both the Crewe to Liverpool line and the Halton curve, which, in those days, was a fully used double track line.

One Sunday track maintenance work was taking place between Halton Junction and Sutton Weaver. A Class 40 diesel locomotive was taking 2 or 3 loaded ballast wagons from Runcorn to Sutton Weaver, unloading the ballast, then pushing the wagons back to Runcorn for re-loading. This operation was repeated several times during the day.

In the afternoon I heard a commotion and, on looking over the fence, I saw the Class 40 lying on its side on the Crewe bound line. I presumed some of the ballast had fouled the running line and derailed the locomotive.

Within 2 hours two breakdown trains appeared, both steam hauled by British Rail 9F Locomotives. One came from the Speke direction and the other from Chester via the Halton curve. The trains were stabled on the Halton curve lines below the Halton Junction signalbox. It only took the breakdown gangs two hours to re-rail the locomotive and get everything back to normal.

I wonder how long it would take today if a similar situation occurred with all the various bodies which have to be involved, and the investigations which have to take place?

WE

HELSEBY STATION REPORT

It has been a slow start to the gardening season due to the cold weather. Our efforts have been concentrated on Platforms 2,3 and 4 as these will be involved in the 150th Anniversary events mentioned elsewhere in this Newsletter.

The garden at the Warrington end of Platform 1 has been cleared and awaits planting out for the celebrations. There has not been a lot of work done on the rest of the garden on Platform 1 due to the boards which have been erected to protect the renovation work on the station house building.

We had some minor vandalism over Easter when initials were carved into the sandstone wall on Platform 2 and the bricks on the Helsby Station sign rearranged to form their initials. It took some time to replace the bricks into their correct order.

The renovation of the station house appears to have come to a standstill although we have recently heard that work will recommence shortly.

Plans have been submitted to improve the car park and also install a 'Harrington Hump' on Platform 1. The hump will restore a short section of platform up to a safe height making it easier and safer for passengers to get on and off trains. This is a badly needed improvement and we hope implementation will proceed without delay although we do not have a timescale for such work.

Several of our volunteers recently attended the annual 'Adopt a Station' conference at Chester.

Finally, we would like to again appeal for new volunteers to work on the station gardens. There is a large amount of work to be done and we are always short of helpers. A working party takes place every Friday morning from 9.00am to 1.00pm and we would welcome any new volunteers who can give an hour or two to keeping this local amenity in first class order.

WE

PRESTATYN - EVEN MORE TO OFFER

The brand new shopping development is conveniently located for the station and makes Prestatyn, which was always a pleasant destination, an even better place to visit in 2013.

The new "Shopping Park" in Prestatyn opened on March 7th, featuring a large "Marks & Spencer's", "Tesco", "Next", "River Island", "Poundland" and "Boots" plus a "Costa" Coffee Shop to refresh you. There are also cafes in "Tesco" and "M&S". So there are plenty of places to spend your money as well as the existing Prestatyn High Street where the local arts centre, the "Scala", also has a cafe together with a wide choice of films available. Further up the street a wide range of local shops and cafes are trading and waiting for your custom.

The old Prestatyn Railway Station, which dated from the building of the Chester & Holyhead Railway (CHR) in 1848, had been neglected for years. The adjacent goods shed likewise. Both have now been thoroughly overhauled and together have been transformed into a Reproduction Furniture Shop. Many of the original features have been retained in both buildings and it is well worth a visit. The Goods Shed is not open to the public but a look through the door at the workshop was granted on request. For railway enthusiasts the restored Francis Thompson building is a delight and the Goods Shed is a relic from a bygone age of horse drawn drays and manual handling of goods.

The rebuilt London North Western Railway (LNWR) Station building, which dates from 1901, is also restored to perfect order with a new and overhauled roof and brand new booking office. Buildings of this type are rare and this one is an early example of pre-fabricated building which were kit built at Crewe Works for erection around the LNWR empire. This example probably now being unique in Wales.

The new footbridge which has received some criticism but blends the old LNWR & CHR Stations together with the modern Shopping park to form an assembly which sits more easily on the eye. Hidden from view on the other side of the Station is the old Station Master's house. It is just up the slope of the bridge near where the footbridge lands on the sea side of the station. This now functions as an interesting cafe, which is quiet compared with the throngs in the new Shopping Park. It will be a rewarding visit to yet another building with a railway history. Prestatyn I would suspect is unique in having four railway buildings, in perfectly restored condition, which are all in use for commercial activity and are in close proximity to each other. It is charming.

JH

...and finally SOMETHING INTERESTING FOR THE ENTHUSIAST – 150 YEAR CELEBRATIONS

These celebrations provide an opportunity to travel over some short 'passenger services over unusual lines' as well as the Halton Curve from Frodsham Junction which normally sees just one train a week.

Some 'rare track' at Helsby is the line in the Hooton direction, from Warrington, as normally only the first train to Ellesmere Port in the morning allows travel over the junction; this Monday-Friday train uses Platform 3. You need to get up very early to catch it, as it leaves Warrington Bank Quay at 05:49 and Helsby at 06:03. The other direction across the junction is easier as the last train in the afternoon, 16:04 Ellesmere Port to Warrington, runs that way. All other Helsby to Ellesmere Port trains depart from Platform 4 at Helsby, and use the facing crossover at the Hooton end of the station.

At Ellesmere Port, no booked passenger trains travel through the station as electric trains from Liverpool and the meagre service from Helsby both terminate there. Unlike the similar arrangements at Kirkby and Ormskirk, however, a connection still exists and the special will use it. The line to Helsby is entirely mechanically signalled throughout, and uses facing crossovers at the commencement of every journey except one.

CH/JH

NEWS IN BRIEF

- **A tree for Phil:** At the end of May, Edith Edwards and her daughter Rachel came to Frodsham Station and planted a tree on platform 1 in memory of Phil. Apparently, Phil was not a gardener during his lifetime but Edith and Rachel scattered some of Phil's ashes under the tree in the hope that it will grow well.
- **New fence:** A 10 metre length of heritage style railings was installed at Frodsham station in May. The fence is such a good match to the adjacent 100 year old railing and blends in so well that many people don't notice the change. Hopefully, we will be able to extend the fence if and when funds permit.
- **Website:** NCRUG recently made a successful bid to Frodsham Town Council for £300 to finance some professional assistance with creating a new website.
- **Conference:** A group of members attended the Arriva Trains Wales station adoption conference on 22nd May at the Queen Hotel in Chester.. The format was changed this year so that delegates sat at round tables each with an ATW manager which allowed an excellent exchange of news and ideas.
- **Open for business:** Frazer James (hair design) opened for business in the Station house at Frodsham on 5th June. Hearing the voices of clients and staff coming from the open windows for the first time was quite a moving experience – the house has come alive!
- **Helsby:** At the end of May four members of NCRUG helped garden designer Patrick Swan to plant the 150th anniversary garden at Helsby. On 1st July, a group of members will be travelling to Blaenau Ffestiniog (courtesy of Arriva Trains Wales) to bring a commemorative plaque down the Conwy Valley Line from Llechwedd slate caverns and on to Helsby where parish councillors will be waiting to receive it.
- **Bus replacement:** Trains will be replaced by buses between Chester and Manchester, via Warrington Bank Quay, on a number of Sundays over the summer due to the on-going electrification works in the Chat Moss and Manchester area. Check before you travel!

JB

=====

Contacts: Chairman:- Janet Briggs, T 01928 732142 E chair@ncrug.org.uk

Secretary:- Cedric Green, T 0151 6258017 E secretary@ncrug.org.uk

Membership:- Philip Briggs, T 01928 732142 E pandjbriggs@btinternet.com

Joint Editors:- John Hobbs, T 01925 818791 E Johnhobbs@aol.com

and Cedric Green, details as above.

British Transport Police:- T 0800.40.50.40

Note: The opinions expressed in this Newsletter are those of the individual contributors and not necessarily those of the North Cheshire Rail Users' Group (NCRUG).
Visit our website: WWW.NCRUG.ORG.UK to leave your comments, favourable or otherwise!

=====

STOP PRESS

P.T.O

I hope that many of you will join us on Saturday 6th July to celebrate 150 years of rail between Hooton & Helsby. I have been very excited and heartened by the joint working between the 3 train operators – Arriva Trains Wales, Merseyrail and Northern Rail – on the day we will have a Northern 156 running on Merseyrail track with Merseyrail staff on board with the added bonus of an Arriva catering trolley on the train!

As always the Station Friends & Rail Users along the Line have also worked tirelessly – it will be good to see the new gardens at Helsby and at Ellesmere Port and Little Sutton the gardening efforts of the Station Friends can be seen.

At Ellesmere Port Station between **11.30 and 13.15** I hope to have plenty for people to see and do – I am arranging a photo opportunity at 12.30 and the vintage bus and state of the art new enviro bus will also be there. I have also invited the *I Travel Smart* – Smarter Choices team to come along.

We are also pleased to be able to offer FREE ENTRY to the National Waterways Museum on production of your 6th July rail ticket. A full visit is usually 3-4 hours and entrance prices are normally £6.50, £5.50 or £4.50 (but for this you can get a years free admission) so why not enjoy a short free visit on the 6th July and then buy an annual pass and come back to many of their events over the next 12 months.

Special train ticket information:

The price is £10 adult / £5 child. No railcard or child discounts. Valid for travel on Saturday 6 July 2013 only. Available to purchase from any Northern or Merseyrail staffed station from Monday 1 July 2013 – ask for a **Helsby Hooton 150 Day Ranger**.

Valid for travel as follows:

Northern Rail:

- Any service between Liverpool Lime Street and Liverpool South Parkway / Warrington Bank Quay including intermediate stations
- 0942 Liverpool Lime Street – Hooton via Warrington Bank Quay special
- 1137 Hooton – Helsby special
- 1210 Helsby – Hooton special
- 1307 Hooton – Liverpool Lime Street via Runcorn (mainline) special

Merseyrail Electrics:

- Any service between Ellesmere Port / Hooton and Liverpool City Centre including intermediate stations
- Any service between Liverpool City Centre stations and Liverpool South Parkway including intermediate stations

Any questions please give me a call – Sally, 01244 976788 or 0773 652 3863, sally.buttifant@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk