

LEICESTER NORTH NEWSLETTER

JAN 2011

NO. 36

The Leicester North Newsletter is an independent publication, and whilst every effort is taken to ensure accuracy of information, any discrepancies are not the responsibility of the Great Central Railway.

“FORWARD!”

At the time of writing this the temperature is struggling to rise above freezing point, and we have been experiencing some of the coldest weather that we have had to endure for many years. No doubt the experts will just explain it as nothing more than a “blip” in a virtually unstoppable phenomenon known as “Global Warming”, so I suppose, in actual fact, we should be rejoicing in these low temperatures, and be making the most of the respite! Difficult though, isn’t it?

Well, back to reality! Here we are, once again, at the beginning of a new year, standing, as it were, looking through a doorway onto uncharted territory, and remembering the successes, and failures, of a year gone forever.

From our railway’s point of reference, things haven’t gone too badly, bearing in mind the current economic situation, which continues to be with us unfortunately, so hopefully we will be able to weather another year successfully.

2010 saw several notable achievements, with the opening of “Lovatt House”, continuing progress with the Mountsorrel Branch Line, construction commencing on a turntable, news of a new café at Quorn & Woodhouse, and work continuing apace on Loughborough’s canopy. But what of this, the Leicester end?

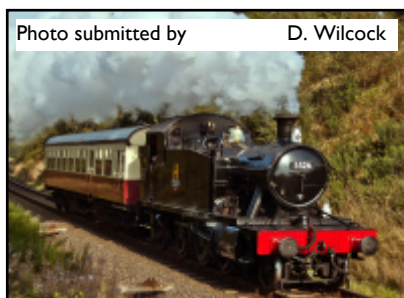
Whilst, realistically, the possibility of doubling the track down to us is not possible at the moment, we do have the very real possibility of the ill fated “Green Acres” development next door actually coming into some form of use shortly, hopefully in a way that will be beneficial to your local station.

But there is another possibility that has been in my thoughts for a number of years... Leicester Central Station! No doubt many of you will be aware of the sorry state of this once valuable asset to the travelling public, but which seems to be being allowed (like so much of Leicester’s Victorian Heritage) to continue to degenerate.

My dream for that building (realistic or not) is for it to be brought back into the public domain, not, of course, as a railway station (too late for that) but it would be ideal for, say, indoor markets, exhibitions, craft shops, with possibly an outstation ticket & booking office, and even, perhaps, a GCR charity shop. Letting my imagination go completely wild, what about a Vintage/Classic Bus shuttle between there and Leicester North Station, if only on Gala Week-ends?

Some years ago I submitted these ideas to the Leicester Regeneration people, who showed interest and asked me to leave my material for them to discuss at their next board meeting, but heard no more.

Letters to the ‘Mercury’ have produced favourable comments, so how about it? I believe that if enough people wrote, either to the ‘Mercury’, the Council, or the Leicester Victorian Society something might be done, so why not make it a “New Year’s Resolution” to try and rescue that grand old building? After all, it’s slap bang in the middle of a development area, (and the “High Cross” retail area) and use it as a gateway to your local station, so, over to you “Leicesterites”. To slightly misquote the Bard ‘the pen is mightier than the bulldozer’. Obviously, in the final analysis, it is beyond the GCR’s jurisdiction, and up to those in charge of Leicester’s “Regeneration Programme”, and to all of us who would like to see something positive done to enhance our railway which, after all is a major tourist attraction in our area.



WINTER STEAM GALA!

The first major event of 2011 will be the Winter Gala, at the end of January and promises to be especially interesting in that we will be able to see, for the first time on this railway, an Auto Train. (see photo below)

For those not familiar with the concept they were introduced by the GWR and used for push-pull trains, and powered by a steam loco. With a driving cab at one end of the coach it enabled the driver to control both vehicles without the necessity of being in the cab of the loco, thereby eliminating the need for the engine to run round to the other end of the coach at each journey’s end.

An ingenious arrangement controlled the regulator when running ‘coach first’, situated below the floor of the cab. The fireman, of course, remained in the loco cab, firing and also controlling the valve gear settings, driver, guard and fireman communicating with each other via an electric bell.



Owing to our usual closure during December there is nothing to report, with regard to this station, although maintenance work etc will be ongoing, but things will be back to normal in the February issue, so, all that is left is to wish all our visitors...



RE-CREATING THE EXPERIENCE

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THE GREAT CENTRAL RAILWAY (1899-1969)

(A Short history)

With its continental loading gauge, slow curves and lack of grades steeper than 1 in 176, the Great Central was years ahead of its rivals routes into the Capital.

Add to the aforementioned the plan to continue under London, and then, after travelling south, to traverse the English Channel via a Channel Tunnel, one can see that it would have been a wonderful asset to the nation.

Who knows how much further it would have developed by the present day?

The Great Central Railway (London Extension) was the brainchild of the Victorian Industrialist Edward Watkin, who envisioned a rapid rail link to the continent that would have been far superior those of his rival's.

Unfortunately, by the 1950's the national network was under acute threat from road transport, which was reaping the benefits of the new motorways that were being constructed, and which was also suffering from a serious lack of investment be the government of the day.

This, coupled with the fact that the areas served by the GCR were also covered by other lines, which had always looked upon it (the GCR), as an interloper, made it inevitable that it would be the first to go, under the "Rail Rationalisation Plan, the now infamous "Beeching Plan".

TELEPHONE NUMBERS LEICESTER NORTH

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LOUGHBOROUGH CENTRAL

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LEICESTER NORTH STATION

The original station that used to stand on this site was known as BELGRAVE & BIRSTALL, but, by the time that the present Heritage Railway had reached this far south the buildings were in such a sorry state, owing to vandalism, that the decision was taken to rebuild. To have rebuilt to its original specification would have been prohibitively expensive, so the present station is something of a compromise (**plans are, however in the pipeline to make many improvements**), any donations that you feel able to make, to speed up these proposals would be most welcome (please use the Donation Box in the Waiting Room.)



If you are wondering how the original station used to look, see the above photograph. It was a typical GCR station with the usual "Island" platform, accessed via a flight of stairs from the bridge. If you look to the left you will see where the original staircase descended from the bridge (now bricked up) The present station is sited a little further south than the original. The two intermediate stations, ROTHLEY, and QUORN & WOODHOUSE, still being intact will give you a better idea, although there is a photo of the original station on the wall of our waiting room.

Pre Beeching the railway continued south, the next main station being Leicester Central, from there continuing on to Whetstone, Lutterworth, Rugby and finally terminating at London St. Marylebone.

Please remember to sign our Visitor's Book which will be found on the desk in the Waiting Room!



Forthcoming Attractions on the GCR

January 16: Charnwood Borough Council Guided Cycle Ride
 January 28-30: Winter Steam Gala
 February 12/13: Diesel Running Weekend
 February 13: St Valentine's Sunday Luncheon Dining Train
 February 26/27: Enthusiasts' Event
 March 5/6: Meet Peppa and George
 March 6: Quorn Swopmeet
 March 13: Charnwood Borough Council Guided Cycle Ride
 March 25-27: 1960s Gala
 April 3: Mothering Sunday Luncheon
 April 9/10: Mini Steam Gala
 April 22-25: Easter Steam Special

If you wish to be kept informed about L. Nth. this newsletter (and back issues) is available online. Go to www.gcrailway.co.uk click on 'About Us', scroll down to 'Press Releases' and you will find it.

Leicester North Arrivals & Departures every Sat. and Sun. from 6th November to 2011 Notification Except Special Events.

'Special' timetables apply on 'Gala Days', 'Ivor The Engine' events etc!

Arrivals
 10.12. 10.44. 11.44. 12.44. 1.56. 2.44. 4.12.
Departures
 10.15. 11.00. 12.00. 1.00. 2.10. 3.00. 4.25.

Leaflets advertising 'Drive a Train Experiences', Dining Trains etc available from Waiting Room!