

# "WHAT HAPPENED TO STEAM" – SOME FACTS

This article by **Richard Strange**, Secretary of the Steam Railway Research Society, was first published in the January 2018 issue of the Mangotsfield Railway Bulletin.

It is reproduced here as the Engine Shed Society has been at the forefront of revealing how the 'What Happened to Steam' (WHTS) booklets were compiled and every member of the HSBT team is a member of the Engine Shed Society.

I refer to the works of Peter Hands. It is said that one should not speak ill of the dead - in this case the recently dead (October 2017) - but it is necessary to make an exception.

His subject matter was locomotive allocations, withdrawals and disposals from 1/1/57. Maybe those subjects are of limited or no appeal to the reader, but they were **basic** to the organisation and running of the railway whilst the eventual disposal of redundant assets is a significant part of railway history. It should, therefore, be of concern to all railway enthusiasts that the principal published 'history' of those subjects was so deeply, deeply flawed as to constitute what I believe to be the greatest deceit/fraud of railway history ever perpetrated.

The evidence laid out by the 'HSBT' team in various issues of the modern-day *The Railway Magazine* and in the 'What Really Happened to Steam' website, ought to have thoroughly discredited the Hands works. Indeed, the results have been quite spectacular in preventing many a book, article and caption from being contaminated, and several well-known publishers have been greatly embarrassed to find the historical value of their works significantly decreased.

<http://www.whatreallyhappenedtosteam.co.uk/sitemap.htm>

Unfortunately, as we say, "much damage has already been done", and many already published books,, articles and captions in websites carry statements of 'fact' derived from *What Happened to Steam*. That is a price we pay for widespread naivety, but shortly after the death of Hands I was concerned when I became aware that there were **still** followers of his who worshipped the man and his works.

So here I hope to set before members **some** facts about the origins of the data contained in WHTS. I cannot repeat all the evidence found by the HSBT team but, rest assured, we spent a great deal of



The HSBT team has found various photographs which prove visually that the Hands books cannot be trusted. This is the one I like best. Hands said ex-LMS Jubilee Class 4-6-0 No. **45608 Gibraltar** was cut up at Cashmore, Great Bridge. Not only do the Cashmore records show this not to be the case, but perhaps a reader could tell me where the River Tyne is at Great Bridge, and how often ships such as seen in the background here were observed there. This photograph from ESS member Trevor Ermel was taken in the yard of Clayton & Davie on the banks of the River Tyne in November 1965.

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Why start at January 1st, 1957? That is an easy one. That was the only date at which it was possible for Hands to establish the allocations of all surviving BR steam from the Ian Allan Locomotive books at one time.

### ALLOCATIONS

Before moving to disposals, the subject of most deceit and fraud, I offer a few lines about the allocations. As the author declared in the books, if there had been more than two changes in allocation in any year, only two would be offered to readers. That alone says much about the respect or otherwise given to railway history!

The dates were in the form of calendar months. Admittedly this kept space occupation to a minimum, but it introduced great uncertainty, since **many** dates of change in his sources spanned more than one calendar month. Thus the reader had no way of knowing which month the event took place in.

### DISPOSALS

Already we perhaps have a suspicion that the "pig in a poke" saying applies, but then we turn to the disposals. What were his sources?

Although he did not acknowledge it in his books, the principal source for sales of locomotives to breakers was the data contained in the Railway Correspondence and Travel Society (RCTS) monthly magazine *The Railway Observer*, obtained directly or indirectly via the compiler, Peter Trushell.

I will not go into the why and wherefore of how Peter Trushell came to give Hands the data, and whether or not the Society had copyright of it. Suffice it to say that **no official approach – even as a courtesy** - was made by Hands to the RCTS, and one incandescent Society luminary in Nottingham made it clear to me what would have happened to Hands if he had got hold of him. The outrage was almost palpable.

### SCRAPPING DATES

Next we should consider the historical value of the dates Hands gave for cutting at Workshops. Most of these were 'deduced' from *The Railway Observer* reports of visits to Workshops.

This was done by finding dated visit lists, and deducing from the presence and subsequent absence of locomotives, which calendar month they were cut up in. So, how would you establish the cutting month from lists which showed a locomotive to be present (for example) during visits in May and June 1959 but not in one made in July, if (again for example) the June visit was made on the 10th of the month and the July one made on the 20th of that month? Perhaps you would have a formula to be used to decide in which month the cutting took place?

I do not know who made the deductions, but someone certainly did and they yielded imprecise and valueless results.

### SALE DATES & CONCENTRATION POINTS

Anything else? Why yes! The disposals by sale published from 1965 by the RCTS in the *The Railway Observer* were generally of the form: - "the following locomotives were sold to XYZ in Calendar Month A". Many of the sales **were** made in the month given, but that is mere serendipity. HSBT checking against official records shows that the vast majority of 'sale' dates were actually the calendar months of **movement** to breakers, and the true sale dates were anything up to four or five months previously.

I do not know why the information was presented in the *The Railway Observer* as described above, but it was, and it was used by Hands in his disposal works.

More yet? Yes. As the rate of sales increased, some breakers were unable to take in locomotives immediately they became available, so BR established a number of 'Concentration Points' where locomotives already sold were gathered and held until breakers could take them in. Examples were at Shrewsbury and at Wednesbury.

The RCTS lists contained little or no information on the use of these sites, thus neither did the Peter Hands' books. As a result, cross-checking with official records reveals that in more than one instance Hands shows a disposal/scrapping date which was **months before the locomotives even left the Concentration Point!**

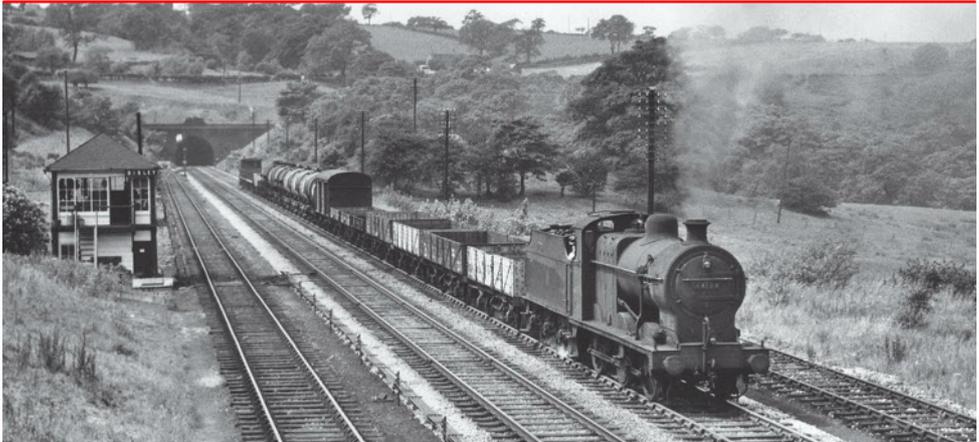
### MISSING INFORMATION

Can there be even more? Check this out. Even after his acquisition of the RCTS data, Hands was still faced with having no disposal information for several thousand locomotives. Then he struck it lucky, or so he thought, for an RCTS member in Northampton began sending him lists of locomotives he had "found" the disposals of. Hands took the correspondent at his word despite warnings from Peter Trushell, and incorporated these heaven-sent gifts in his books. The trouble was that the Northampton chap was either a pathological liar or an excellent practical joker, for HSBT has established beyond any doubt that he **made up** his revelations.

More? Oh yes, keep reading. Hands included post-withdrawal, so-called storage locations and dates. How on earth could he have known these for thousands of locomotives? He **did not** of course. In almost all cases he applied a formula, which seemed often to result in locomotives being shown as stored at the depots of last allocation for a complete month (!) before disposal/scrapping.

Unfortunately for railway history it has since been shown that hundreds of locomotives were **NOT** stored either at their final depots of allocation or for the periods shown and, in some cases, were moved

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Not directly further visual evidence but I thought it a nice picture. Ex-LMS Class 4F 0-6-0 No. **44134** is seen at Disley South Junction in this photo courtesy of Rail Archive Stephenson. The loco was cut up at Cashmore, Great Bridge, not at Bird, Long Marston as per Hands.

several times to other sites, including to the BR-established Concentration Points.

#### **HANDS' RESPONSE**

What did Hands have to say when asked about all the above? He stated that he **NEVER** saw an official document. His excuse has been that at the time he did not have access to the same records as the HSBT team had. No, but **only because he did not try**, for many of them were around.

For example, he only lived fifteen miles away from the most prolific breakers' yard of them all – Cashmore, Great Bridge. In fact, his one and only visit to a private scrapyards was – by his own admission – Willoughby, Choppington.

He has attempted to shift the blame for the majority of his errors on to the chap from Northampton, which is disingenuous in the extreme. Although some **2,500** so-called disposals were supplied by "Zulu" (as we call him in HSBT), that is far from a majority (14.6%) of the **17,782** locomotives extant at January 1st, 1957. The other false 'facts' were of Hands' own compilation.

In summary then, is there any information in the Hands' books which is reliable? The answer in a word is "**NO**" as how can you possibly know what is accurate and what is not?

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