

WHAT REALLY HAPPENED TO STEAM (WRHTS)

STORAGE OF WESTERN REGION LOCOMOTIVES



Class 5700 0-6-0PT No. **9707** at **Southall MPD** on August 20th, 1964. It had been officially transferred to Taunton during week ending August 8th, however, the transfer never actually took place and 9707 was withdrawn on September 7th 1964. It remained at Southall until November 27th when it was sent for scrap to Bird, Risca.

Colour Rail

*In Link 91 **Roger Butcher** wrote about the HSBT Project, an initiative to establish accurate data on the storage and disposal of the steam locomotive fleet from 1957 – 1968. In this issue he explains why it took over a quarter of a century before the accuracy of the "What Happened To Steam?" (WHTS) books was seriously challenged. In addition, Roger previews one of the many issues relating to the project which will be featured in the next update in *The Railway Magazine (RM)* later this year.*

The absence of an update last year in the *RM* on the WRHTS Project has led our detractors to suggest (hopefully in their eyes) that the project had foundered. Far from it as will become obvious when the *RM* publish towards the end of 2012 a comprehensive update on all aspects of the project.

In advance of that article I am very grateful to the Editor for giving me the opportunity to confirm the project is 'alive and kicking' and it was only the fact that for me personally 2011 was a very difficult year that caused the anticipated update in the *RM* not to take place. In my enforced absence the team working on the project has continued to beaver away and I am grateful to them all (three of whom are ESS members!) for all their hard work.

BACKGROUND

Most of you reading this article will be familiar with the tale by Hans Christian Andersen 'The Emperor's New Clothes'. If not, no doubt it is on the internet somewhere! As the person responsible for the HSBT Project, both financially and legally, it is often now said to me 'I thought there was something wrong about the WHTS books as they didn't seem to tally with my own observations.' However, until the project was launched in the *RM*, there was a great reluctance to speak about it. Particularly, as most railway publishers who reported on steam locomotive storage and disposal information had become used to using the WHTS books as if they were completely reliable reference books.

The evidence we now have points to the unpleasant truth that up to two thirds of the storage and scrapping data is fictional. Drawing on our Western Region database as an example I will say more later in this article as to how and why we can substantiate that claim.

Steam Railway REVIEW

So, why on earth did it take over a quarter of a century for this deception to be uncovered? It is a question best answered by going back to when the WHTS books were first published and then detail – as best I can – the sequence of events that culminated in Nick Pigott and his team at the *RM* having the

courage to officially launch the HSBT Project in October 2009. That was despite knowing very well that not only would it upset the compiler of the books but also all those publishers/websites/individuals who had blindly copied the information and would not take kindly to what we were revealing. Three years, on we now know that the WHTS books were even more inaccurate than we originally believed!

It is my personal opinion that the inability of the *Steam Railway* reviewer of the WHTS books in 1982 to ask **any** searching questions gave the books a badge of credibility they did not, by any stretch of anyone's imagination, deserve. In a whole-page review titled "*The Ultimate Train-spotter*" the feature claimed that '*by painstaking research and incredible attention to detail he (Peter Hands) has managed to find out the places and dates where and when (17,000 odd steam locomotives) all were finally stored, sent for scrap and broken up.*' Unbelievably, the reviewer also claimed '*the copyright he (Peter) now holds will in time be worth a mint.*'

The review also claimed that Peter had '*so many reliable sources*', a claim the HSBT Project simply does not accept. The only sources mentioned in the review were two individuals and *The Railway Observer (RO)*, the journal of the RCTS.

RCTS

The RCTS was understandably furious that the information contained in the *RO* had been used without even the courtesy of the society being asked for their permission, whilst the society was never acknowledged in any of the WHTS books.

Unfortunately, the RCTS Management Committee – either in anger or conceit – failed to ask the very obvious question (I would have thought) as to where did the information not in the *RO* come from? At best the *RO* could only have provided around a third of the information required – the key data for storage location, dates of storage, scrapping location and date of scrapping amounting to 68,000 separate facts!

Instead of asking that key question and challenging the authenticity of the books, they (understandably) berated Peter Hands – that fact being described in the *Steam Railway* review as '*occasionally the odd unwarranted nasty letter appears*' – but focused their ire on the society's expert on locomotive disposal information, Peter Trushell. Quite ridiculous when you consider that Peter **personally** provided around 85% of the disposal information published in the *RO*, his job on British Rail giving him access to the movements of withdrawn steam locomotives. Peter Trushell's 'sin' was to have his name mentioned in the *Steam Railway* review and a small number of the books. He did not ask or wish to be mentioned and provided **nothing** additional to what he had already submitted to the *RO*.

If the RCTS had asked the right questions, the WHTS series may have been stopped in its tracks, but they didn't and the rest is history, and not very good history!

1980s

The background detailed above has been written retrospectively – in other words I knew nothing of it at the time. My interest in railways at that time was focused on departmental stock and on-track plant. It was not until the second half of the 1980s that my interest in the steam locomotive era was reignited by purchasing Michael Hale's brilliant series on *Steam in South Wales*, that series having been published in the early 1980s. I subsequently became aware of the WHTS series and they were gradually acquired (at approximately £2 each) from the Ian Allan bookshop at Waterloo. If I knew then what I now know I would have spent my £100 differently! What those people who have spent up to £500 at auction for the complete series of 50 WHTS books now feel is best not thought about!

1990s

During the early 1990s I began to realise that some of my observations and notes from the 1960s were at variance with the WHTS books. Naïvely I wrote to Peter Hands in October 1992 suggesting that a Volume 51 (an amendments book) would be worthwhile and I would be happy to contribute to it. Peter replied on October 6th stating '*I will try and get the book done during 1993.*' I followed up my letter with a similar request in the column that I then had in *Rail* magazine. My suggestion was not taken up – I now realise why! – and there I let it rest.

In May 1995, following a recommendation by Ben Brooksbank, who had kindly sold me copies of his photographs of steam locomotives in South Wales, I joined the Steam Railway Research Society (SRRS). I duly met Richard Strange on May 13th at The Bridge Inn, Shortwood, Bristol and was very impressed by his enthusiasm and knowledge. His distaste for what we both now know as '*The Bullshit Brigade*' was very apparent, whilst his views on the Peter Hands books were made clear! Little did I realise it at the time but the seeds for the HSBT Project had been planted!

I retired from my job as a Local Authority accountant in 1997 to set up my own publishing company. For the next 10 years my focus was on the trade magazine I publish *Rail Infrastructure* and the associated on-track plant books. However, during this period there was a key moment in the story I am telling – in 1999 I acquired a copy of the Cashmore company's official records of the locomotives it had scrapped! It was vaguely my intention to one day compile a book on the Newport yard as it was only a few miles from where I was born and I had been a regular visitor in the mid-1960s. Little did I then realise that eight years later these records would serve a different purpose!

TERRY HAYWARD

My publishing responsibilities and love of Spurs meant that my interest in the storage and disposal of the steam locomotive fleet was now dormant and probably would have stayed that way if fate had not intervened.

In the latter part of 2007 my lifelong friend Terry Hayward survived an operation for the removal of a tumour. We decided it would be therapeutic to relive our 1960s trainspotting days by discussing and analysing the steam locomotives we had seen together. Fortunately, we had both retained comprehensive and detailed records of what locomotives we saw and exactly where and when we saw them.

Terry also had a complete set of the WHTS books but, like me, he had never actually compared them with his personal records. As part of this exercise we started to and it was Terry who initiated what was to become a routine of randomly checking our own observations against the equivalent entry in the WHTS books. It soon became clear that the level of discrepancies was way above what could be reasonably explained away by Peter Hands' consistent caveat that '*there are bound to be some errors*'.

So convinced was Terry that the WHTS books were seriously flawed, he offered to painstakingly compare the Cashmore records (more than 2,150 steam locomotives scrapped) with Peter Hands' books – a long task, but one that would give us an idea of the extent of the problem. I can still vividly recall visiting Terry soon after he had finished the exercise and him asking me to guess what percentage of the Cashmore entries were incorrect. I think I guessed at 10 per cent – the answer was over 50 per cent!

THE NEXT STEP

The official launch of the HSBT Project was still some 20 months away as I pondered as to what – if anything – we actually did about what we were uncovering. In general terms I became a bit of a Victor Meldrew constantly bringing up the subject at railwayana auctions or when talking to other railway enthusiasts.

One person who did take my concerns seriously was John Redgate, then the Chairman of the RCTS who suggested that the *RO/RCTS* would be a suitable medium to take matters forward. Whilst very much appreciating John's support, my instinct was that it was not the best way forward. It was a decision that subsequent events have proved was correct and I will explain exactly why in the forthcoming update in the *RM*.

The 25+ year wait for someone to seriously challenge the Peter Hands' books finally came to an end when both the above-mentioned Peter Trushell and Richard Strange contacted me following my company's 2009 greeting card which showed a photograph of a 'King' and two 'Castles' outside Cashmore's Newport yard, whilst the photograph caption mentioned I had a copy of the official Cashmore records.

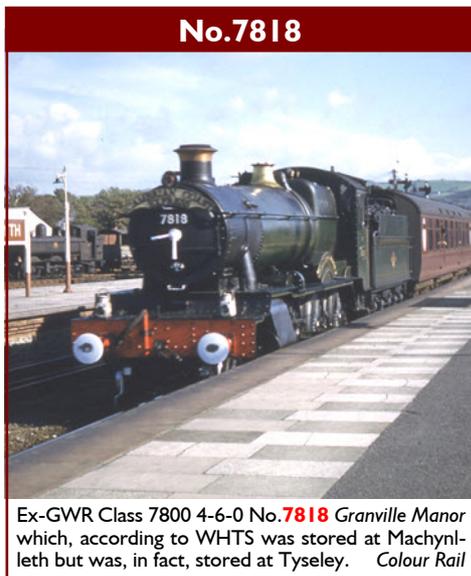
The HSBT (Hayward Strange Butcher Trushell) Project was born and on May 24th, 2009, Terry and I approached the *RM* team at the Eastleigh Works open day event. Following a very positive meeting it was agreed that the *RM* would officially launch the project the following October.

In the meantime Nick Pigott was adamant that I must give Peter Hands an opportunity to put his side of the story. I duly contacted Peter and met him at his house on August 20th. It is only fair to put on record that I was politely received and our meeting was cordial and I was able to put the questions to him that *Steam Railway* and the RCTS failed to do over a quarter of a century earlier.

My notes for that meeting state:

- a) With the exception of his own personal observations, Peter has no supporting evidence to say where any of the information came from.
- b) Peter states that the information came from railway magazines and 'reputable railway enthusiasts'.
- c) He could not recall who these 'reputable railway enthusiasts' were.
- d) He has never seen, nor had access to, any official records.
- e) That there were bound to be '*some mistakes*'.

Having duly briefed the HSBT team and Nick, the project was launched in the November 2009 issue of the *RM*.



STORAGE OF WESTERN REGION LOCOMOTIVES

The first part of this article dealt comprehensively with the question I have been asked most since the HSBT Project was launched. In the second part I preview, using the Western Region as an example, the answer to the question in the October 2010 *RM* 'How accurate is the information on the storage of locomotives in the WHTS books?' The answer then given was 'We are only in the early stages of comparing the storage data with what has been published. The early signs are not encouraging though'.

The above answer proved to be an understatement! Earlier in this article I made the point that the key data for storage and disposal (with appropriate dates) comprised 68,000 separate facts. It follows, therefore, that the storage data comprises 34,000 facts and, whilst the *RO* was strong on the location of scrapping (but **not** the dates), the percentage of the information required - for storage location and dates of storage - that was contained in the *RO* was relatively small.

So where did all this storage information in the WHTS books come from? In the first article in the *RM*, Richard Strange was quoted as saying that the books contained 'a significant amount of information that appeared simply to have been guessed at'. It was Richard's belief that the storage location was always the last allocated depot, whilst the dates given merely filled in the gap between withdrawal date and the date of scrapping column. Although Peter Hands strongly refutes that suggestion, I had made the same point when Terry and I had been discussing in 2008 our observations of No.3862 stored at Didcot Shed on March 28th, 1965. 3862 had been withdrawn on February 6th, 1965 and its final allocation was Croes Newydd, that being where the WHTS book showed it as stored from 2-65 to 6-65.

FORENSIC EXAMINATION

Quite obviously, before going public with our belief that the storage details in the WHTS books were not factually-based we needed to have sufficient evidence to back that statement up. Using the HSBT database on Western Region locomotives as an example, it is fair to say that the storage data we have gathered bears little resemblance to that contained in the WHTS books.

So clearly the alleged 'formula' does **not** provide the correct answer. But why doesn't it, because you would have imagined that often it **might** do?

TWELVE REASONS WHY THE "FORMULA" DOES NOT WORK

1. When the shed, because of the restricted space available, did not normally store locomotives when they were withdrawn eg Bromsgrove, Goodwick, Merthyr and Yeovil.
2. When the locomotive failed away from its home depot and was stored at the shed where it was condemned. There are many, many examples of this on the Western Region.
3. When there was a 'paper' transfer shortly before a locomotive's withdrawal and the reallocation did not take place eg Nos 5744, 8728 and 9707.
4. When there was a final transfer of a locomotive that was **not** notified to the enthusiast/commercial press, but is in SRRS records. Before giving some specific examples I will say a little more about this category as almost everyone, including the Editor of Link, has expressed surprise when I have mentioned this particular issue.

In simple terms, the SRRS records on a locomotive's allocation are based on official internal BR Regional advice sheets whilst the society or commercial magazines have varying interpretations of the information issued by the various regional public relations offices.

As the editor responsible for the Western Region book the HSBT Project intends to publish, I have been stunned by the number of reallocations that never made the railway press. The specific reasons for the omissions and errors detailed below may be worthy of an article of its own in Link in due course but, as far as I can judge, all the various books purporting to deal comprehensively with locomotive allocations contain the same omissions and errors - in other words they **all** originate from the same secondary sources. Some, of course, are better presented than others.

Where an omission in the railway press impacts on this article is, of course, when the final transfer has **not** been published in the railway press. In other words the **last** allocated depot is not the one the author of the WHTS books believes it to be! So, for example on the Western Region:

NUMBER	ALLOCATION ACCORDING TO RAILWAY PRESS	WHTS STORAGE LOCATION	ACTUAL LAST ALLOCATION	ACTUAL STORAGE LOCATION
4103	BRISTOL BR*	BRISTOL BR*	TAUNTON	TAUNTON
4131	BRISTOL BR*	BRISTOL BR*	TAUNTON	TAUNTON
4132	RADYR	RADYR	SEVERN TUNNEL JCT	SEVERN TUNNEL JCT
5262	LLANELLY	LLANELLY	SEVERN TUNNEL JCT	SEVERN TUNNEL JCT
5600	TREHERBERT	TREHERBERT	RADYR	RADYR
5634	NEYLAND	NEYLAND	MERTHYR	RADYR
6770	TRURO	SWINDON WORKS	SWANSEA EAST DOCK	DANYGRAIG
7213	OXLEY	OXLEY	LLANELLY	LLANELLY
7818	MACHYNLLETH	MACHYNLLETH	TYSELEY	TYSELEY

* BARROW ROAD

Almost all the 'actual storage locations' for the withdrawn locomotives listed on the previous page were not only already on the SRRS database but were seen at the same location by myself.

5. When stored on sub-sheds (rarely reported in the *RO* in the latter years of Western steam) eg Cheltenham (Malvern Road), Lydney, Pantyfynnon and Whitland.

6. When Peter Hands got his old and new shed codes confused eg No.3746 storage shown as Exmouth Junction not Westbury (Westbury taking on the former Exeter St Davids shed code).

7. When for one period the home depot **did** store its own withdrawn locomotives, but for another period they were instead stored at a nearby depot eg Old Oak Common locomotives being stored at Southall when Old Oak Common was being rebuilt as a diesel depot.

8. When a closed-to-steam shed with extensive sidings stored locally-based withdrawn locomotives but was virtually never recorded in the *RO* eg Cardiff East Dock (when it was a diesel depot), Danygraig and Stratford-upon-Avon.

9. When, even if the storage location is correct and it did go to the correct scrap location (BR or private), the fact that so many of the scrap dates are incorrect means, self evidently, that the dates for storage **have** to be wrong as well because the scrap date quoted is always one month after the end of the storage period given.

In this category of error a 2-3 month dating error is very common and 4-6 months not unusual.

10. When a locomotive was sent straight to Works on withdrawal (or was already there) – but its presence at Swindon was **not** recorded in the *RO*. Often then shown as the home depot.

11. Conversely, when a condemned locomotive never went to Swindon Works but was 'sold from site'. Many examples of these being shown as stored at Swindon Works despite never going there after withdrawal.

12. Failure to recognise the difference between when a withdrawn locomotive is stored at a Works or a shed. Many examples at Swindon saying Works when shed and *vice versa*.

ENGINE SHED SOCIETY

As mentioned in the introduction of this article, there will be a comprehensive update in the *RM* on all aspects of the HSBT Project towards the end of this year. However, for the avoidance of any doubt, I should mention that, whilst the examples on storage data detailed above only refer to the Western Region, the principles apply to **every** region. The stark reality, therefore, is that we can now prove that the WHTS books contain **tens of thousands** of errors.

The challenge now is to be able to publish a series of books that detail what really happened to steam and I would appeal to all Engine Shed Society members to consult their notebooks/records and, if they have not already done so, to get in touch (my contact details appear below).

No.4132



Ex-GWR Class 5101 2-6-2T No.4132 is pictured at Tenby with the 08.40 Paddington to Pembroke Dock. It was withdrawn in week ending July 18th, 1964 and stored at its home depot, Severn Tunnel Junction. No.4132 was sold for scrap to Cashmore Newport on September 4th, being moved to Town Dock East Sidings, Newport (the reception sidings outside Cashmore s yard) on November 3rd. It was taken into the yard for scrapping on December 16th, 1964. *Colour Rail*

Although, of course, we still need more scrapyards data, the current focus is on withdrawn locomotives and when and where they were really stored. As a starting point, just an outline list of the areas/sheds you visited, and when, would be very helpful (as ESS member John Frisby has kindly just sent me).

The forthcoming *RM* update will feature the positives and negatives (mostly positives fortunately) of the responses we have had from the various publishers and railway societies. **The Engine Shed Society is very high on the positive list – please give me even more reason to eulogise about our society!**

CONTACTS

Websites:

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www.wrhts.co.uk

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