



WHAT REALLY HAPPENED TO 7303 I

by RICHARD STRANGE



BR Standard Class 5 4-6-0 No. **73031** at Gloucester in July 1963, possibly heading a trip working from the LMR Goods Depot
Colour-Rail BRW1790

The accuracy, or otherwise, of the information contained in Volumes Two and Four (authored by John Walford) of the RCTS series on BR Standard Steam Locomotives, has recently come under close scrutiny. In this issue Richard Strange studies the history of Class 5 4-6-0 No.73031, which spent several months of 1958 allocated to the Rugby Testing Station.

This locomotive's claim to fame is that it underwent tests at Rugby Testing Station, as mentioned in Volume Two of the RCTS series on *BR Standard Steam Locomotives*. Unfortunately the details in that book about 73031 during the years 1957 to 1961 are not only incomplete but significantly incorrect. In this article I set out to record in some detail what *really* happened to 73031 during this period and to correct the details given by John Walford.

On page 64 of the RCTS book the allocations of the engine are given, *inter alia*, as "6.57 Bristol Barrow Road; 1.58 Rugby Testing Station (operating from Bristol Barrow Road when not undergoing tests at Rugby); 2.61 Bristol Barrow Road; 11.61 Bath Green Park".

The *official* LMR internal Stock Change Advices (**not** the information quoted in magazines) state that the allocation to Barrow Road commenced during the week ending May 25th, 1957. Local shed notes compiled at Barrow Road show 73031 was last serviced there on November 9th, 1957. Official Derby Works notes (transcribed by an enthusiast who worked there) show the engine was due at the works on November 11th, 1957 for a General Repair. On November 10th, 1957 it was seen in Deadmans Lane, on December 8th it was in the Erecting Shop, and on January 18th, 1958 in the Paint Shop.

The Engine Record Card at The National Archives (TNA), Kew, gives the departure date from Derby Works as January 22nd, 1958. The LMR Stock Change Advices show 73031's reallocation to Rugby Testing Station during the week ending January 25th, 1958. The Rugby Testing Station records, which the NRM have made available online, show - in the Summary of Tests - that 73031 was under test from February 11th, 1958 to October 31st, 1958.

From February 23rd, 1958 73031 became a WR-owned loco, on loan to Rugby Testing Station from Barrow Road. Although the LMR Advices - for some inexplicable reason - did not report the return from loan, the WR records at TNA, Kew indicate it was reallocated to Barrow Road during the week ending on November 15th, 1958.

ALMOST DAILY BASIS

Records from Barrow Road shed show that 73031 was received there on November 14th, 1958. From that date, until it visited Swindon Works in February 1960, the shed records and those made by enthusiasts show that 73031 was around Bristol on an almost daily basis. Yet on Page 79 of the RCTS book author John Walford states that, in addition to a series of tests at Rugby between February and October 1958, *for a period of six weeks in the spring of 1959, 73031 was at Rugby for further tests.*

The online version of the Rugby Testing Station records does show under "Files" that 73031 was undergoing superheater and cylinder performance tests from December 30th, 1956 to June 17th, 1959, but there is nothing to indicate that it was *present* at Rugby "for six weeks in the spring of 1959".

Were the RCTS records incomplete or incorrect? Had they been incorrectly transcribed? What was the source for the author's claim for 73031's presence in 1959?

I can only point to the combination of Barrow Road records and observation notes made by enthusiasts, as mentioned above - during the period April 1st to June 26th, 1959 these show 73031 at or working to/from Barrow Road on fifty-eight days. The locomotive was also likely present on several additional Sundays, when the shed records do not show which locomotives were present but not working. The longest period of continuous absence - and even here the locomotive was certain to have worked or been on shed away from Bristol on occasions - was one of five days, which hardly amounts to six weeks!

A PARALLEL UNIVERSE!

I wrote to Messrs Walford and Taylor (the former being the author) about 73031 on May 13th, 2003. Apart from some of the more detailed notes of 73031's movements, I gave them all the above details. In response I received a three-page screed from Mr. Walford. I must say that I remain at a loss to understand how the author's references to "Red Herring", "Lord Bane of the Historian", "Scourge of the Sacred Scrolls", "a Parallel Universe", "the Japanese" and "Miss Marple" are relevant, but let that pass for now, except to remind readers of Roger Butcher's references to "treacleland" on Page 53 of his article in Link 106.

In summary he indicated that he considered the allocation data in various magazines - commercial and society - to be "official", and thus backing up what was in the RCTS book. His date of February 1961 for the return of 73031 to Bristol was, however, seemingly based on a *personal observation* of his, rather than a date appearing in a magazine.

Readers might note that the author did remark that "the only official information available to me was the locomotive's Engine History Card"! Also that the Engine History Card showed "To WR on 1/2/58". He added the comment "no indication of a specific depot allocation (normal)", yet to him this did not apparently constitute evidence that a transfer to a WR depot had taken place!

VERY SELECTIVE CORRECTIONS

On the appearance of Volume Five of the RCTS Standard Locomotives series I looked to see what additional or correcting information appeared about 73031. I read: "*Although the Rugby Testing Station was closed in 1959, the engine does not appear to have been officially reallocated until much later but certainly by February 1961*". Nothing there about the author having concluded as a result of my comments and a visit by him to the NRM on July 4th, 2003, that NO visit to Rugby was made in the spring of 1959 after all, yet he included this in his three-page letter of response!

Perhaps that is not so surprising as, prior to publication, the RCTS stated that 'selected corrections' would appear in Volume Five. It inevitably begs the question as to how seriously advice or comments were followed up. I would suggest that even 'very selective corrections' would be an understatement!
