



WHAT REALLY HAPPENED TO No.45504

by ROGER BUTCHER

As the enormity of the scale of errors in the storage 'information' (both dates and locations) in the 'What Happened to Steam' (WHTS) books becomes ever clearer, Link will from time to time highlight individual locomotives of particular interest to ESS members. In this article Roger Butcher compares the primary information the HSBT Project has for Patriot 45504 ROYAL SIGNALS with what was published in the relevant WHTS book.

The opportunity is then taken to update ESS members on the ongoing work of the HSBT team.

According to the second impression of Volume 7 in the WHTS series of books, 45504 was stored at its home shed of Bristol (Barrow Road) shed in February 1962 before being cut up at Crewe Works in March 1962. As the first Patriot I ever saw, I asked **Richard Strange** for the primary information the Steam Railway Research Society has on the withdrawal, storage and disposal of this locomotive. His reply is detailed below.

45504 ROYAL SIGNALS

'Firstly it needs to be said that the WHTS storage dates in general are so vague as to be meaningless. As to where the storage 'information' came from, Peter now blames in the July 2013 *Railway Magazine* the RO stating that a 1962 issue mentioned that "storage at home depots after withdrawal appears to be the norm nowadays. So where I had no personal or reported sightings I must have based the storage entries on that". Really! And there's the purchaser of these wretched books believing the information in the books was based on facts! Anyway, the accompanying photographs and text answer your question as best I can'.

February 4th. Photographed by Martin Garmston as it entered Mangotsfield station with a short down freight at 12.25 pm. (See photograph below). The working was also recorded by me.



February 5th. Seen by Brian Basterfield, working an up freight of 23 vehicles at Halesowen Junction at 12.42 pm.

February 6th. Observed by Mike Thomas at Spetchley at 8.18 pm on a northbound freight of 35 vehicles.

February 17th. On this day it was working trip freights between Westerleigh yard and Bristol St Philip's/West Depot. In my photo (*below*) it was running light engine northbound through Mangotsfield at 1.00 pm.



February 24th. Michael Mensing photographed No.45504 on a most unusual job, the 6.00 pm Snow Hill to Wolverhampton. (*See photo below*).



February 28th. Worked a Gloucester–Bristol slow train, *which I caught at Mangotsfield at 7.50 am*; and in the evening the 7.43 pm St Philip’s–Bescot freight.

March 2nd. Noted at Mangotsfield, working the evening St Philip’s–Bescot freight.

March 7th. **Not seen** on a visit to Bristol Barrow Road shed.

March 10th. On Crewe South shed.

March 16th. Condemned.

March 18th. On Crewe Works scrap line. Cut up by **March 23rd, 1962**.

CHARACTER ASSASSINATION

As I clearly stated in Link 108 it was my hope / intention – regarding Peter Hands – to now look forward and not be distracted by the past. Unfortunately, a very serious allegation has subsequently been made against me by an ESS member. An allegation which I now need to deal with, once and for all, particularly as it is not the first time the allegation has been made, Peter Hands having used exactly the same words in letters to both the Editor and President of the ESS in October 2012. So, whilst it is known that the ESS member concerned is a friend of Peter’s, and his writing style and use of words is remarkably similar to Peter’s, I, nevertheless, have to assume (rightly or wrongly) that the email was written quite independently of Peter.

The key point of the email to the Editor of Link was to accuse me (in relation to Peter) of ‘character assassination’. According to the *Oxford Dictionary of English*, ‘character assassination’ is ‘the malicious and unjustified harming of a person’s good reputation’. Unjustified means ‘Not shown to be right or reasonable’. I have no idea what experience the ESS member concerned has of legal matters but he is on very dangerous ground making written statements he cannot substantiate. Quite simply, no one should make such a serious allegation without having the evidence to back up what they are stating in order to successfully defend any action taken against them.

The truth is there is precisely nothing in any of my three *Railway Magazine* articles and various ESS articles that isn’t right or reasonable. Great care has been taken to ensure we can provide (to a court if necessary) evidence of what we are saying. Does anyone really believe that *The Railway Magazine*, their lawyers, the Editor of Link and the ESS Committee would publish what I write if they were not 100% confident of the work of the HSBT team. Of course not!

TENS OF THOUSANDS

The email also claims ‘it seems to me that the percentage of inaccuracies in WHTS is not as high as we are made to believe’. No evidence, of course, to back up that statement! The reality is the error count runs into tens of thousands and please don’t say that dates don’t matter! They are absolutely fundamental to any historical reference book and Peter’s belated justification that he should have said the dates were approximate is embarrassing at best and, at worst, something much more serious.

EXCLUSIVITY

The email goes on to infer that Peter has some sort of exclusive hold on the subject and that we should be working with him. Whilst on Peter’s website Peter states ‘it should be my responsibility and mine alone to rectify mistakes in my books.’ It is clear Peter simply doesn’t grasp that we have started with a blank sheet and are endeavouring to do what various enthusiasts (who have been in touch with us) tried to do in the 1970s – publish (as accurately as possible) a history of the withdrawal, storage and disposal of the latter years of the steam locomotive fleet.

Does anyone really believe that Peter was the only person (bearing in mind the RCTS had around 5,000 members at the time) to trawl through the RO and manage to list where some 14,500 locomotives were scrapped. Far from it as we have learnt. The major difference between Peter and those other would-be authors was that they could not proceed further because:

- a) Some 2,500 disposals were not recorded in the RO or the other available periodicals.
 - b) For so many of the approximately 14,500 locomotives whose disposal was known, accurate scrapping dates were not known.
 - c) Whilst some storage information was available, much of what was required for a series of books wasn’t, particularly if you were trying to date the lengths of the period of storage.
- So the would-be authors all decided it was impossible to proceed.

AS IF BY MAGIC

And then - as if by magic - Peter came up with all the answers. All 68,000 of them! However, we now know that:

- a) The missing 2,500 disposals were sourced from a fantasist from Northampton.
- b) The scrapping dates listed are often sales dates.
- c) All the dates were approximate - in other words guessed at.
- d) It was assumed (because of a 1962 RO statement) that storage at a home depot was the norm. Yet another ‘formula’ to fill in the considerable amount of data which wasn’t available from Peter’s ‘personal or reported sightings.’

15 MILES AWAY

Despite all the above being revealed by the painstaking work of the HSBT team and the wonderful

support we have received from ESS members and readers of *The Railway Magazine*, Peter's website welcomes new fans of the WHTS books and speaks of the support of many of his former customers. I would suggest you would need to live in a fantasy world of care bears and unicorns to believe that Peter's books still have the support he claims that they have.

Yet Peter's extravagant claims are nothing new. In the foreword to his books he states 'This booklet is only part of seven years of intensive research.' How one can use the word intensive and yet not even think of travelling 15 miles from one's home to borrow or examine John Cashmore's official company records of the BR locomotives they scrapped is beyond my comprehension. The company was still active during the 1980s buying BR rolling stock and the detailed ledgers were available to anyone who took the trouble to ask. And this was the company that scrapped more BR steam locomotives than any other private concern in history!

SEVERN VALLEY RAILWAY NEWS

I wasn't quite sure what to expect when I was told that the Spring 2014 Severn Valley Railway News had an April Fool article in it! Whilst I realise that it has angered – and I sympathise with – those people who feel very bitter about the money they spent on buying Peter's WHTS books (£500 at today's prices for the complete set) I have to admit there appear to be as many people laughing at Peter as are angry with him!

Inevitably we have the exaggerated claim of his 'vast personal records' whilst he has now 'travelled the length and breadth of the country' in his pursuit of information. Again he infers that the publishing of the WHTS books was a hobby – not quite how the people who spent so much money buying the books see it!

As for his reference to 'the ever-present spectre of the critic' (presumably me) 'do not be deterred – keep going', I can only say I suspect (and hope) it would be impossible for anyone to ever again publish and get people to pay large sums of money for a series of books with so many errors in them. So, let us just be thankful that Peter's Mark 2 version of his books are free!

RCTS INTRANSIGENCE (Re 9F DISPOSAL INFORMATION)

Meanwhile, in treacleland, the RCTS simply continue to refuse to answer the five questions posed on page 53 of Link 106 and on page 706 of the October 2013 RO. The only official response so far is from David Bird, on behalf of the Publications Sub-Committee, who states in his annual report 'We are concerned about some suggestions that a small amount of information relating to locomotive disposals may need further research and we are checking our sources before committing to a reprint'.

Yes, it beggars belief! Falsified sales dates, formula-driven scrap dates, Zulu fabrications – hundreds of facts dismissed as 'a small amount of information'. As to 'checking their sources' I clearly need to inform the society of Zulu's new address in Northampton as he has moved house since he left the RCTS.

NON-EXISTENT MIDDLE GROUND

For the avoidance of any doubt, can I make it clear that I have no intention whatsoever of approaching, as suggested by Gordon Davies, the RCTS Publications Committee to arrange a meeting. I dread to think how much time Keith Gunner and I have already wasted on this issue – including a meeting with one of the RCTS Management Committee – since we first corresponded with John Walford in the autumn of 2010. Approaching four years later we have made no progress whatsoever and I regard the proposed meeting as no more than an escape route for the RCTS to non-existent middle ground. Simply answer publicly those five questions referred to above or allow an independent panel to review both sides' documentary evidence.

Key to the defensive strategy of the RCTS in dealing with the accusation that its 9F book contains fabricated information, formula-driven sales and scrap dates etc, is that no one is interested (anyway) whether that accusation is correct or not. Whilst the email traffic we have from RCTS Branch Chairmen / Secretaries / members tells a different story, even to suggest there is a lack of interest in whether information is fictional or not is patronising at best. And yet the publicity blurb for RCTS books continues to reveal that the society is trapped in a self-congratulatory bubble. And, as the Steam Railway Research Society found out long before I did, that to engage with the RCTS Publications Committee can be compared to walking through treacle.

100% ACCURACY

Returning to Peter Hands, Peter always likes to complete his letters by getting in a 'dig' about the WRHTS books being able to achieve 100% accuracy. And I mean always. He clearly believes he is being 'clever'. Coincidentally, no doubt, the email from the ESS member did the same. The reality is the full picture will never be known. Our books will have gaps as well as information which may have to be qualified. They will, however:

- a) Be transparent and accountable.
- b) Not contain guesswork on storage locations and dates.
- c) Not be cursed by formula-driven scrap dates.
- d) Not contain around 2,500 fabricated disposals.
- e) Not contain approximate dates. We will only publish what we know.

An announcement on the proposed publication dates of our first WRHTS books will be made in Link 111.
