

WAS RICCARTON JUNCTION SHED REALLY INACCESSIBLE BY CAR?

by **ROGER BUTCHER**



The ITS engine shed and adjacent coaling stage at **Riccarton Junction**.

Continuing the series of articles on sheds and works whose latter days have not been reported correctly, Roger Butcher discusses the shed that was generally regarded as the most inaccessible in the country. The opportunity is then taken to update ESS members on a number of matters, including the ongoing work of the HSBT team.

In my article in *Link 121 Eight, Nine, Ten!* I referenced my visit with Terry Hayward to Riccarton Junction Shed on April 24th, 1965. A locomotive shed which was not listed in any of the shed directories we possessed whilst the traditional description in subsequent reference books on BR locomotive sheds is on the lines of "there is no road access whatsoever and the site was serviced by the railway only".

With grateful thanks to ESS member Hamish Stevenson, it is now possible to reconcile the above paragraph with Terry and I accessing the station in Terry's trusty Ford 100E! The answers were revealed in a quite amazing 55-page book written by Riccarton Junction resident Christopher (Kit) Milligan. Published in 1994 and printed at Cophaw Resource Centre, Newcastleton, the book details Kit's 'memories of my life in this railway village'.

A RAILWAY VILLAGE

The village consisted of 34 houses, a school, a village hall and a store. There were only three roads at Riccarton, one at the back of the houses, one in front of them and one at the bottom of the hill next to the railway. Sitting in front of the houses numbered eleven to fourteen was a big water tank that fed three water columns to give water to the steam locomotives. The tank was filled from a dam about a mile up Lees Burn and piped down into the tank.

THE LOCOMOTIVE SHED

About one hundred yards south of the station was Riccarton South Signal Box. Near the signal box was the locomotive shed and coaling stage which normally was home to two locomotives. One was for assisting trains up the bank from Newcastleton to Whitrope and did the shunting in the goods yard. This engine was used twenty-four hours a day, manned on a three-shift basis, and was known as the pilot engine. The other engine worked the 7.12am passenger train to Carlisle and a goods train back at lunchtime, every day Monday to Saturday down the branch line to Reedsmouth and returned about 1pm when it changed crew and shunted in the goods yard in the afternoons.

Under the south signal box was the locomotive and surfaceman's bothy. The far end of the building was where the drivers kept their oil, tools and waste. In the middle of the building was the drivers' and firemen's bothy with the most enormous fireplace. Over the back of the coal stage was the locomotive turntable, large enough to turn the biggest locomotive.

Occasionally larger locomotives had to come from Hawick to get turned as its own turntable was too small. At the side of the turntable was the cattle loading bank where sheep and cattle were loaded for sales at Hawick and Holm, whilst in the Down Yard the last siding was on the edge of a big tip where the firebox ashes were tipped out along with any other waste.

FORESTRY ROAD

Kit Milligan's amazing book confirms that this legendary and isolated community was serviced by the railway only, all the provisions for the village store arriving by train. As did the post, which arrived from Hawick on a train that came in at 9.10am.

Until 1963 that is! Kit recalls that a forestry road was laid down in 1963 starting from the Hawick to Holm road, across the Windshiel Burn, up over the edge of the Fanna, cut into the hillside and then very steeply went down through Lees Burn and into Riccarton Junction.

It took just a matter of weeks to make the road, Dent stone quarried out of the hillside being used. Kit can remember the first car coming in and he was now able to get in and out of Riccarton Junction on his motorbike! Sadly Kit's adopted father passed away in January 1964, shortly after being taken to Hawick Cottage Hospital by ambulance and Kit believes he was the first person to be conveyed that way and not by train as before.

Kit comments that the forestry road access into Riccarton Junction meant a number of 'strangers' were now accessing the village. This meant that – for the first time in his lifetime (he was born in 1934) – it was now necessary 'to lock our doors.'



The "Grocery Store", a branch of the Hawick Co-operative Society, viewed at Riccarton Junction in the 1950s.

Fortunately, there is no reference to a Ford 100E with four young men from Portsmouth in his marvellous book! My thanks again to Hamish Stevenson for sending me Kit's book!

Link 124

Richard Strange's article in *Link 124 What Happened to Steam – Some Facts* has prompted a number of questions to myself and the HSBT team. It is my intention to answer them here, but then draw a line on any further comments as more than enough would have been said for those interested in the subject to have decided for themselves what the evidence the HSBT team has published proves or does not prove.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Q/ Richard Strange suggests that the Hands' WHTS booklets are 'the greatest deceit/fraud of railway history ever perpetuated'. Is that an opinion you would support?

A/ Whilst Richard is the Secretary of the long-established Steam Railway Research Society, I am basically just a very motivated railway enthusiast, so do not have sufficient knowledge of railway history to make that judgement. However, it is obviously relevant to mention here that a senior member of the NRM staff at York was prepared to sign an affidavit (should it be required) on the same lines as Richard's statement, albeit in words slightly less strong than Richard's.

Q/ Richard spoke of his concern that there were still followers of his (Peter Hands) who worshipped the man and his works. Is that really the case despite the extensive evidence that has surely completely discredited the WHTS booklets?

A/ Again, Richard is right although we are talking of very small numbers. In my judgement there will always be some people who refuse to believe ill of anyone and that is a major reason why, in the UK legal system, judges now accept a 10-2 majority verdict from a jury.

Q/ Richard clearly believes that Peter Hands is more culpable than the 'rogue correspondent' Peter blames for the majority of the errors in the WHTS booklets. In fact, Richard states that Peter Hands was warned at the time that the fabricated information that was being sent to him could not be true. Peter publicly denied having any knowledge that he was being sent false information, so, what is the truth?

A/ Firstly, it is not, in my view, remotely credible that someone publishing a series of 50 booklets should not challenge/query where thousands of missing 'facts' have (magically) come from. Ultimately the responsibility lies with the person/company publishing the booklets and taking the profits. On this point, Zulu, as we refer to him in HSBT, was at pains to point out to me when I confronted him with our findings that he had received no payment whatsoever for any 'information' he had sent to Peter Hands and could not, therefore, be subject to any legal proceedings against him.

Secondly, yes, I have documentary evidence to support what Richard has stated. Whilst as regards the formula-driven 'information' that dominated Peter's storage location data, the simple point is that it was not factually-based and so Richard's stated view re Peter's culpability is clearly valid.

IN DENIAL

As I stated earlier in this article, it is in everyone's interests that a line is drawn in discussing the issues around the WHTS booklets. Those who wish to support Peter's view of his booklets can do so whilst those of us who believe his booklets are best suited to the fiction area of the library are entitled to their opinion/view.

Our energy must now be focused on one final attempt to source the information we still do not have. There is, however, one claim I was only recently made aware of that simply cannot go unchallenged. Apparently there is still a statement on the WHTS website where Peter claimed "Taking into account the adverse publicity which has been aimed at WHTS over the years from certain sections of the railway press it speaks volumes that during my travels to numerous railway venues I have only discovered a handful of [my] booklets for resale. My only conclusion to this is that collectors of WHTS have more faith in my work than my detractors."

How anyone could have 'faith' in a set of 50 very expensive booklets that have been shown to have – at least – a 50% error rate is beyond my comprehension. You would need to be very gullible or perhaps family or a close friend of the author who simply wish to be 'loyal', an emotion which – in itself – I completely respect.

So, what is the reality of why the WHTS booklets are rarely offered for resale either by booksellers or at auctions? The answer is inevitably the polar opposite to Peter's suggested explanation! Until the HSBT project was launched in the latter part of 2009, a full set of the 50 WHTS booklets could go for close to £500 at auction!

Once the first article in *The Railway Magazine* was published, their 'value' collapsed and there was no longer a financial incentive for dealers to put together sets for auction. Equally there is a concern amongst dealers about the legality of knowingly selling books which are widely discredited because of their extensive flaws. Ironically, if the booklets enter the *Guinness World Records*' books (as has been mooted) for having the record number of factual errors, their value could increase because of their notoriety!

Be that as it may, the very last set of WHTS booklets sold at auction (before their collapse in value) was owned by an ESS member! Whilst he had some concerns about the accuracy of the WHTS booklets, he was aware that their high value would help finance a computer upgrade he wished to invest in. His timing was perfect, although he hopes it wasn't an ESS member who bought them!

NORTHAMPTON GRAMMAR SCHOOL

On the subject of ESS members, I was approached last year by a relatively new ESS member who believed he knew the identity of Zulu, the RCTS member from Northampton (whose name we have not published) who supplied Peter Hands with some 2,500 fabricated scrapping locations and dates. Following a recent meeting with the abovementioned ESS member, it transpired they both went to Northampton Grammar School! And yes, Zulu (as we refer to him in HSBT) was already known to be a fantasist at the age of fourteen!

Sadly, it was his practice to try and impress the younger railway enthusiasts with all the locomotives he had seen/copped, etc. All shown in a very neatly and much underlined ABC combined volume! Trouble was he never went on the school society railway trips, nor went shed-bashing with anyone from the school. So, whilst the 12-year olds he was trying to impress did not take him seriously, older (and supposedly wiser) people were later to swallow his fantasy world hook, line and sinker!

RCTS

Which brings me neatly to the RCTS! Despite the promises made some years ago that – should the society reprint its book on the 9Fs – it would remove the information fabricated by its Northampton member, that has not happened. So, purchasers of the reprinted book need to be made aware that the disposal details have significant input that is known to be fabricated.

Back in the day it would not have happened of course. The editorial scrutiny exercised on, for example, the marvellous series on Great Western Railway locomotives would have prevented the contaminated information (in such significant quantities) getting through. And, if it did get through, it would have been quickly acknowledged and corrected rather than a decision to defend the indefensible. And, most certain of all, it would not have been reprinted without correction. The people responsible should be ashamed of themselves for putting cost savings before integrity and the respect of their membership/readership.

IRWELL PRESS

Thankfully, most railway publishers are not keen on including information fabricated in a terraced house in Northampton nor facts that are formula-driven/guessed at. And, therefore, are not 'facts'. For example, the marvellous series of books on Great Western Railway locomotives by Irwell Press on Panniers, Prairies, Halls etc, focuses on primary source material and – ever since the revelations published in 2009 in *The Railway Magazine* about the locomotive storage and disposal information contained in the WHTS booklets – Irwell Press has ensured no such tainted material appears in its books.

It is, of course, not a decision only driven by editorial integrity, but by commercial realism. If your potential readership does not have confidence in you, they will buy from a publisher in which they do have confidence. For example, I and my HSBT team would always choose the Irwell Press books on LMR

locomotives over the RCTS versions authored by John Jennison.

In contrast to the RCTS, Irwell Press primarily through ESS member Richard Derry, has taken a keen interest in our work and has asked permission to use our data should any of their Great Western Railway locomotive books be reprinted.

I will, of course, give that permission - all we ask is an acknowledgement similar to that you see printed about the HSBT Project in the catalogues of some of the major railwayana auction houses.

ACCURACY

In an era where 'fake news' has become an everyday term it has become apparent that for some the truth does not actually matter a great deal. As has been shown by the marvellous response we have had to the WRHTS Project, most people though do want to be able to believe what they read on subjects they are interested in.

To a small minority though, we are religious zealots, error vigilantes, nit-pickers, etc. Generally, but not always, those comments have come from writers who have used material dreamt up in a terraced house in Northampton and feel foolish because their recycling of fabricated information has been exposed. Proper research is incredibly time-consuming and clearly we could have completed our work much quicker if we took the route of 'making up what we don't know'. Whilst Peter Hands' mantra was that his booklets were not 100% accurate, he was also making the point that everyone makes mistakes. Not a remotely credible excuse for the many thousands of errors in his WHTS booklets, but - as a specific comment - yes, everyone does make mistakes. For my own part, my reference to the depot in Temple Mills Yard in *Link* 125 needs clarification/correction.

The date I walked through the 'shell' of the building (ie with its walls and roof still intact) was July 25th, 1986. That site visit was during a trip around the East London yards searching for internal user vehicles and departmental coaching stock. By the time of my visit on August 31st, 2000, all the track and structures in the yard had been removed but - amidst all the undergrowth that now occupied that area of the yard - I suddenly realised I was walking along the concrete floor of the shed with 'filled-in' inspection pits both sides of me. A real surprise to me as I was not actually looking for the site of the shed, simply trying to get through the undergrowth as quickly as possible!

HSBT PROJECT

Firstly, very many thanks to everyone who has responded to the final appeals for information that have been sent out recently. ESS member John Stretton has very kindly loaned his detailed and extensive trainspotting notebooks to John Aitchison, whilst the legendary Robert Humm is helping with improving our data of exactly when withdrawn locomotives arrived at Eastleigh, Robert being a very regular visitor to that depot when he lived in Southampton.

Thanks too to ESS member Phil Marsh for facilitating the IoW contacts Keith Gunner needed to ensure the IoW section of the Southern book is as accurate as possible. The only significant outstanding query relates to whether the O2s scrapped by Jolliffe were sold to King, Norwich and then subcontracted to Jolliffe. Or were they sold directly to Jolliffe? At the present time, there is no primary documentary evidence either way.

The other area of the Southern book that still needs further research relates to the dispersal and storage of the steam locomotives displaced on June 14th, 1959 by stage one of the Kent Coast electrification. In particular, we would like to be sure of the precise movements of all of the locomotives officially transferred to Nine Elms but which never went there.

As regards the Western Region book, I am very pleased to be able to report that Terry Hayward has now completed the initial draft. A huge task considering how much Western Region information has been made available to us. A quite remarkable achievement by Terry who continues to achieve so much for the HSBT project despite having a range of health issues to deal with. Quite simply, Terry has brought the same relentless focus and determination to his work for the project as he did in our extensive shed-bashing trips together in the mid-1960s. As for the two articles a year I write for *Link* on those trips, can I take this opportunity to thank everyone who has been kind enough to make positive comments regarding my articles and, yes, I do realise how lucky it is that **both** Terry and I not only retain our records of those wonderful times but that I can draw on Terry's memories as well as my own!

And finally, the mystery photograph in *Link* 116 and the correct answer (from John Hall of Birmingham) in *Link* 120 has prompted a number of ESS members to ask me how was John able to give the correct answer! I have subsequently asked John and he had recalled an article I wrote in Issue 180 of *Rail* entitled *Britain's Most Secret Locomotives* and had 'put two and two together.'

As I mentioned in *Link* 116, the shed at RNAD Broughton Moor was my own personal holy grail. It was a shed I managed to visit twice, the first time being on June 13th, 1969 when I was chasing down those former British Railways steam and diesel locomotives sold into industrial service. As it transpired, the diesel locomotive I hoped to see inside the shed at RNAD Broughton Moor had been sold to Bird, Long Marston in November 1966. A subsequent visit to that scrapyard on September 21st, 1969 found LMS 7052 (Hunslet 1721 1933) in the process of being scrapped because 'the big end' had failed, therefore bringing its time as a yard shunter at the scrapyard to a conclusion. A consolation to not seeing LMS 7052 complete is that one of its historic worksplates is in my collection!