



# WHAT HAPPENED TO STEAM – SOME MORE FACTS

by **RICHARD STRANGE** and **ROGER BUTCHER**

*In Link 124 **Richard Strange**, Secretary of the Steam Railway Research Society, explained why the 'What Happened to Steam' (WHTS) booklets were so deeply flawed. The main focus of that article was on the data presented by Peter Hands regarding when and where steam locomotives were scrapped.*

*In this article, Richard focuses on the historically inaccurate nature of the depot transfer data and its subsequent acceptance by various websites.*

## TWO CONCERNS

Since its inception in 2009, the attention of the *What Really Happened to Steam* (WRHTS) team has focused on the disgraceful state of the locomotive disposal information in the Peter Hands WHTS books.

It is gratifying that relatively few publishers and enthusiasts still have faith in the Hands version of locomotive disposal "facts", but I believe there remain two significant areas of concern which ought to be addressed. I view the first task as being to try to draw out the poison which has already entered the system, i.e. the scores of thousands of errors in websites, photograph captions and articles.

Having had their attention drawn to the errors they are harbouring, one website owner has included a caveat about information accuracy, but neither that, nor any other website has either removed or corrected the errors or issued more than an almost casual warning to site visitors.

One site in particular contains disposal information just as Peter Hands and 'Zulu' decided it to be the case; whilst another went a step further and shows a large percentage of its build, withdrawal and scrapping dates as the last day of the month! Incredible corruption even of the already deeply flawed and unreliable dates of mere calendar months in the Hands books, that continues to mislead visitors.

The errant websites could perhaps best be reformed by enthusiasts shunning them, but in the case of magazine articles, books and website photograph captions, it appears to me the horses have long fled the stables and there is virtually no possibility of contacting all caption writers, let alone persuading them and the websites to which their material was uploaded, to make corrections.

## DISPOSALS INFORMATION

Years before I was alerted to the horrors in the disposals information, I had become aware that the depot transfer data was deeply flawed – and this was apart from obvious errors in transcription from *The Railway Observer* and variations in dates according to which source Hands was using.

It has been for more years than I can remember, the case that railway society magazines (and books) had a fixation on publishing dates of the like of MPD transfers in the form of a calendar months, regardless of what form their source showed. The only likely reason I could see was in order to reduce space usage to a minimum, since "10/52" or "Jan/52" was obviously shorter than "5th January 1952" or "Four weeks ending 5th January 1952" for example. This was perhaps a habit persisting from the days when the only official dates reaching enthusiasts were calendar month ones.

Never have I seen anyone suggesting this approximation delivered to the official dates creates an uncertain number of corruptions and outright errors which the reader had no hope of being aware of. Yet it obviously did and does, as can be seen by the huge number of "X week's ending" or "Y months" dates used in secondary documents which end up as calendar months in books, articles or captions.

Perhaps someone can advise me which is the detailed correct week of what is given as "6/60" or "Jun 60", or is the correct month for that matter, if the official source shows three weeks ending "10/6/60"? And yes, it does matter, unless a simple calendar month or a whole year truly is all that is required, but that was a rarity in the accounting and operating sides of railways.

**Not one** MPD allocation date in the Peter Hands books can be taken as reliable, and many are simply wrong in any case, where official records clearly show that the event took place in one or other month for certain. One other avenue of unreliability that Peter Hands offered his readers is that in his books he warned that for reasons of space restrictions, if a locomotive was transferred more than twice within a year, he only showed two transfers!!!

*Following on from Richard's article, **Roger Butcher** takes the opportunity to update ESS members on a number of matters, including the ongoing work of the HSBT team.*

Richard's reference to the issue of false information, or fake news, on the internet or social media is a subject that has generated a great deal of debate in recent years. Unfortunately, there are still some people who have a blind faith in what their 'research' on the internet reveals.

## SECONDARY SOURCES

When the HSBT Project was launched just under a decade ago, we asked each of the (then) key websites whether any of the locomotive disposal information on their sites had been derived from



Enthusiasts visiting Bird's scrapyards at Risca may recall with some affection The Rolling Mill public house, past which Hawthorn Leslie 0-4-0ST 3877/1936 is seen hauling former LT "F" stock for disposal in 1963.

*Tony Sainsbury Collection*

primary sources and, if so, which ones? The sources all turned out to be secondary and two of the sites subsequently included disclaimers with regard to steam locomotive disposals and referred visitors to the HSBT Project.

Forward on to 2019 and only one site, the Rail UK site, appears to be still 'active'. The site has a disclaimer regarding the accuracy of the information it carries and includes a specific reference to the HSBT Project. Whilst we are appreciative of that acknowledgment, the reality is that most visitors to the site do not look at 'the small print' and the recycling of errors continues.

#### **STRATHWOOD**

In the text written above by Richard Strange, he comments that 'It is gratifying that relatively few publishers and enthusiasts still have faith in the Hands version of locomotive disposal' information. Thankfully, Richard is correct in his assessment which means that any publisher who remains in denial stands out like a sore thumb.

Enter Strathwood Publishing, previously Strathwood, and before that Strathwood Limited. With the railway book market being such a competitive area, it was astonishing to see a publisher opening himself to widespread ridicule by praising the discredited Peter Hands booklets. If you are so out of touch with your chosen subject, how much credibility can be given to the captions to your photographs?

#### **BIRD, RISCA**

Well, not much judging by the caption to the photograph on page 113 of Strathwood's recently-published *Steam and the Scrapyards*. The picture published on that page (and published with this article) states that Bird, Risca was a small yard with a short existence!

Complete rubbish! Whilst the above description could quite rightly apply to a significant number of the private scrapyards that disposed of the steam locomotive fleet between 1959 and 1968, it is ridiculous to describe Bird, Risca in this way. Not only was the scrapyards on the site of a former steelworks, but it began scrapping London Underground 'F' stock in March 1963 and its first BR steam locomotive 9618 in March 1964. Closure of the yard came in April 1969. Moreover, the *Steam for Scrap* series published by Atlantic classified the yard as one of the Top 10 yards that disposed of the BR steam locomotive fleet, from more than 100 private scrapyards undertaking the task.

The next six pages include five photographs of steam locomotives allegedly being scrapped at Cashmore's Newport yard. Some nice photographs. Trouble is only one of them is actually in Cashmore's yard and you then realise the publisher has no personal knowledge of the subject nor asked or involved someone who has.

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## IRWELL PRESS

Thankfully, most publishers do either take up our well-publicised offer to ensure that scrapyards text/photographs have some editorial integrity, or simply avoid writing about a subject where they may have to rely on erroneous or fabricated material. For example, Irwell Press in its recently-published *The Book of the Southern Moguls Part One (N, N1 Classes)* state that as regards those locomotives sold to private scrapyards, "we await the publications by the What Really Happened to Steam group to confirm where any particular steam locomotive was cut up away from the BR Works". As regards the forthcoming book from Irwell Press on Qs and Q1s, I am pleased to say that it will have our input. As I have stated before, any publisher who seemingly has a flippant attitude towards editorial integrity will inevitably be affected commercially. If your potential readership loses confidence in you, they will buy instead from a publisher in which they do have confidence.

On the subject of confidence or lack of it, I am aware of one ESS member who is very frustrated when he sees his photographs published in the Strathwood books and for which no payment is ever forthcoming – despite repeated requests. Hopefully, this is an oversight by the publisher and the ESS will be more than happy to act for both parties to resolve the matter amicably.

## HSBT PROJECT

Firstly, very many thanks to those ESS members at the October 2018 AGM who during the day expressed their interest and support for the work of the HSBT team. The support of the ESS has been fundamental in enabling us to successfully reveal how the WHTS booklets were compiled. And I will always be very grateful for that support.

Understandably there is significant interest as to when we will be able to publish the results of the extensive research that has taken place since the project was launched in 2009. It is, therefore, appropriate to say a little more here of how and when the decision to publish will be made.

Normally there is a commercial pressure that influences when a book (or books) will be published. In other words there will be deadlines set by a publisher who is hoping for/expecting a certain level of profit on the books they publish. Frequently that pressure results in books not being as good as they could have been.

For the WHTS books there is no such pressure as my own company *NPT Publishing* will be publishing the books and all/any profits will be distributed to charities of the HSBT team's choice. So, without that pressure the end game is simply to publish when we have no further avenues of research to undertake. And when there appears to be no further opportunities to fill the remaining gaps in our knowledge.

It is also important that I do not lose sight of the fact that our published works will inevitably be regarded as the definitive work on the subject and the books must, therefore, be as complete and accurate as possible. But, as Tony Sayer commented so eloquently at the last ESS AGM, how does one balance the worthwhile search for perfection with an acceptance that one has got as near to perfection as one can and it is now time to publish.



A 1967 view of BR Standard Class 4 2-6-4Ts awaiting disposal in Bird's scrapyard at Risca which, contrary to comments in one publication, was one of the more prolific scrapyard locations.

*Norman Preedy/Rail Photoprints NP387*

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### ONE MORE YEAR OF RESEARCH

Although various factors have delayed my decision, I have always felt that there would come a time when a final deadline for further research would need to be made. Having now reviewed the three books we have in draft form, I believe there is still an opportunity to fill some of the gaps in our knowledge in all three books.

I have, therefore, discussed the matter with my team and ESS members John Aitchison and Keith Gunner have now started on a final initiative which I am hoping will bring some results. Either way, I will explain in more detail in a future issue of *Link*. 2019 will though be the final year of research. It will complete ten years of painstaking effort and we will have done our best, And so, therefore, the Southern, Western and Standards books should all be published in 2020.

As regards the Southern Region book, I am delighted to say that the most significant outstanding query has been resolved thanks to the IoW contacts ESS member Phil Marsh kindly put Keith Gunner in touch with. My main concern was that there was no documentary evidence of whether or not the O2s scrapped by Jolliffe were sold to King, Norwich before being subcontracted to Jolliffe. This is not to suggest for one moment that they ever left the Isle of Wight, but whether it was a direct sale to Jolliffe or not. Thanks to John Woodhams, it is now known that copies of correspondence exist which show that W18 was sold direct to Jolliffe for £695 on December 18th, 1966. John also explained in some detail about Jolliffe's long-term relationship with BR and those facts will be published in the Southern Region book.



Ex-L&SWR Class O2 0-4-4T No. **W22** *Brading*, seen passing Smallbrook Junction in June 1965, was one of thirteen Class O2 locomotives disposed of by HB Jolliffe of West Cowes. Thanks to the HSBT Project's knowledgeable contacts in the Isle of Wight, it is now known that only one Class O2 locomotive (W31) was cut up on the Island by A King of Norwich. *Colour-Rail BRS478*

And finally, that means that more information on the dispersal and storage of the steam locomotives displaced on June 14th, 1959 by stage one of the Kent Coast Electrification is now top of our 'wants' list. In particular, we would like to be sure of the precise movements of all the locomotives officially transferred to Nine Elms but which never went there. Over to you Ross!