2014 Railway Album

Hungerford Chain Mail
Steam Selection

Tony Bartlett



Welcome to my steam review of 2014

These pages are specially selected from my railway annual to complement my articles for the Chain Mail magazine. They cover the steam trains which have featured in the quarterly reports and Sightings page of the Steam Special section of the web-site.

As previously, I employed two Nikon DSLR cameras - the lightweight D90 for casual use and when mobile on the bicycle, and the heavier D800 for more serious occasions when not on two wheels. New this year is a quality 70-200mm f2.8 lens which gives the best performance possible from the camera bodies.

2014 has seen the market for steam excursions still fairly buoyant, and thankfully we have seen a return to 'business as usual' with our local Berks & Hants line back in use for steam after the completion of major work at Reading station.

In our area overall there have been 12 steam locomotives working on main line trains, with 9 different classes represented including 3 Gresley A4 Pacifics (like, but not including, Mallard) and 4 Bulleid Pacifics of various types.

Look and enjoy, *but don't take for granted that we shall continue to see such sights on our main line railways subject to relentless pressure for modernisation.*

Tony Bartlett February 2015



The second special train of the day - picked up on RTT the night before by its unusual origin of Bishops Lydeard - was a transfer movement of GWR Castle Class no. 5029 'Nunney Castle' from the West Somerset Railway depot to the Southall Steam Centre. This seemed to be an attractive subject for getting a photo published, so I selected a favourite spot in the Denford dip on Hungerford Common, where the short train would not be swamped by empty trackwork. Fortunately the sun played its part and it proves that you can't take a bad photo of a sunny GWR steam express - a 'lucky' shot!

Thu 09Jan 13:06 D800 f6.3 1/1000 iso560 66mm





Very cold overnight but clear and bright morning - must see conditions for steam trains. The 2014 programme starts here today with the St. David's Day CathEx from Waterloo to Cardiff. At Andover both platforms are well lined as Black Five no. 44932 pulls in to the station. After a short stop the steam loco gets its 10-coach train under way again, accompanied by much steam and sound and some slipping, and WCR heritage diesel no. 33207 at the tail. Was able to get a number of varied steam-effect shots as the train only slowly picked up speed. Sat 01Mar 09:53 D800 f8 1/800 iso500 230mm 09:57 D800 f8 1/500 iso160 52mm



The first appearance of a complete steam excursion train on the Berks & Hants line this year, keenly anticipated by a throng of railway photographers by the Kennet & Avon canal as Castle Class no. 5043 'Earl of Mount Edgcumbe' climbs vigorously towards Savernake Summit, soon to negotiate the severe curve past Crofton pumping station. The train is the B&H Aquae Sulis bound for Bath and Bristol, and probably only allowed to run through on the line since it approached Reading from the west from Birmingham and by-passed the new station to circle back westwards again. Sat 12Apr 11:39 D800 f7.1 1/1000 iso640 75mm



Hopes of a return to normal steam excursions on the Berks & Hants line seem to have been dashed. Today's Dartmouth Express out of Guildford is to be diesel-hauled out to and back from Westbury, when the locomotive will have to travel along the route west from Reading to meet up with its train! So we have the sight of LNER A4 Pacific no. 60007 'Sir Nigel Gresley' coming off Hungerford Common a couple of hours ahead of its train. On the plus side, the weak early morning sun to the north of the line and the cold air combine to make a dramatic picture of the loco and its support coach. Sat 19Apr 07:11 D800 f6.3 1/1000 iso1250 86mm



West Country' Class Pacific on. 34046 'Braunton' is a recent reintroduction to the mainline fleet, and a genuine one at that - not one of the regulars replated to a different identity for the day! It is in charge of an interesting Cathex today (a Shakespeare 400th anniversary) travelling from Andover (??) to Stratford-on-Avon. Sixty years ago the direct route would be via the M&SW Jct line through Marlborough and Swindon Town to Cheltenham, and onwards by the GW to Stratford. The train is here heading east at Shrivenham before going north at Didcot, having left Andover westwards! Wed 23Apr 10:25 D90 f5 1/1000 iso800 75mm



West Country Pacific no. 34046 'Braunton' again on its second excursion in 4 days, this time heading the first leg of the prestigious Great Britain VII in its seventh year of operation seen here passing through Andover. The tour started earlier this morning from London Victoria with steam 'on the point' as far as Exeter before handing over to diesel haulage to the overnight stop at Truro - a strange way to get to the north of Scotland but in the nature of a land-cruise where the emphasis is on travelling (comfortably) by steam rather than get to any particular place in the shortest possible time. Sat 26Apr 10:12 D90 f4 1/1000 iso320 75mm



A British Pullman to Bath and Bristol had been on the schedule for months and it was good news to find eventually that it would be travelling out and back by the Berks & Hants line. While I was waiting by the canal Merchant Navy Pacific no. 35028 Clan Line came into sight just as the Bruce Trust's Hannah was emerging from the lock behind me. Having got a long shot 'in the bag' I zoomed out and held on as long as I could to get the boat and train passing. The presence of mind was rewarded with a near optimal image with the two crews enjoying a waved exchange of cameraderie. Wed 14May 11:43 D800 f7.1 1/1000 iso400 38mm



You need to be a committed enthusiast to get excited about a Black Five on a excursion train - if you have grown accustomed to and blasé about the continuing use of a small fleet of preserved steam locos capable of operating on the mainline, conveniently forgetting that this class of loco was in use right up to the 'end of steam' in the North West. In this case ever-reliable Black Five no. 44932 is passing through Andover with a Cathex from Rugby nearing the end of its outward journey to Salisbury. There is a modest show of smoke in the absence of steam exhaust in the mild summer air. Thu 29May 13:11 D800 f6.3 1/1250 iso1600 70mm



This Cathedrals Express from Victoria to Bristol is lucky to survive steam-hauled as a ban looms with the continuing fine dry weather. As it is Britannia pacific no. 70013 Oliver Cromwell is provided with front-end assistance in the form of WCR Class 47 no. 47237 to reduce the need for steam-related pyrotechnics - not that much notice is being taken of the fire risk. The fireman has just stoked up the coal in the firebox and he has now come to the edge of the cab for cooling relief from the temperature inside the hard working loco as the train speeds through Andover station. Thu 24Jul 11:39 D90 f5.6 1/1250 iso220 75mm



I've no record of having photographed the attractive-looking (to a child of the 50s) 'blood and custard'-liveried coaching stock used by UK Railtours, and it makes an appealing combination with the Class A1 Pacific no. 60163 Tornado in its BR express blue form - even if this is not an authentic pairing. The typical Bank Holiday weather of gloomy skies and steady rain attend today's Devon Belle excursion from Paddington to Exeter as it passes through Hungerford outbound shortly after its Newbury stop, providing a rare opportunity for steam travel from West Berks. Mon 25Aug 09:16 D800 f5.6 1/1000 iso1400 80mm



Over to Whitchurch on the Basingstoke - Salisbury line for the first leg of a long-weekend excursion which is being run under the old ACE brand. Seemingly ever-present no. 34067 Tangmere is in charge and I've arrived early, but not early enough as another photographer is already in situ and I would be in the way if I stood under the footbridge as planned. So now I've got to make a feature of the footbridge, which does provide a fine frame for the subject but at the cost of masking the exhaust from the hard-working locomotive travelling at exhilarating speed - as befits a premier express! Fri 05Sep 11:08 D800 f6.3 1/1000 iso800 70mm



A return visit to Whitchurch to see another Bulleid Pacific on a steam excursion - this time a 'rebuilt' West Country Class no. 34046 'Braunton' working the Solent & Sarum for UK Railtours. Also different this time is my arrival on two wheels, signifying that the D90 second camera is pressed into use. This time I'm clear of the footbridge with an open view of the station buildings for context. However the special is well on time and coasting as the safety values blow and I have to shoot early to avoid losing the top of the steam plume - worth catching with the sun illuminating from the other side. Sat 13Sep 11:03 D90 f6.3 1/1000 iso560 52mm



The British Pullman puts in a second appearance on the B&H line this year with another of Belmond Hotels' luxury dining trips to Bath and Bristol. I've again forsaken my home territory for a location where I can be sure of getting the full length of the train in the shot. As usual Merchant Navy Pacific no. 35028 Clan Line is in charge seen here passing Brail crossing on the climb to Savernake, not that it is showing any signs of excessive power output with its 13 coach train. A polite request to Belmond failed to elicit the circumstances behind the floral decoration on the smokebox door. Wed 24Sep 11:39 D800 f6.3 1/1000 iso800 70mm



The evening return of no. 35025 Clan Line with the British Pullman from Bristol is beset with photographic difficulties as it will be appearing from out of the sun on its west to east progress. Instead of trying to avoid the problem this time, I've decided to embrace the possibilities - on the landing of the recently rebuilt footpath crossing on Hungerford Marsh I've just managed to get the setting sun out of the frame so that its gold illumination is lighting up the side of the train, while the neutral graduated filter has kept the sky in check, resulting in a pleasingly different study of steam in action. Wed 24Sep 18:06 D800 f6.3 1/1250 iso450 66mm



LNER Class A4 no. 4464 (aka. 60019) 'Bittern' pottering through Newbury station at lunchtime on the through line on its way back to base at Southall - behind the picture is a tale of woe. The steamer should have been on a Cathedrals Express from Oxford to Kingswear in S Devon, picking up the excursion at Westbury. However the WCR diesel working the first part of the journey failed before leaving Oxford, and the organisers were unable to lay on alternative haulage. As a result the trip was cancelled - a very unsatisfactory outcome for the passengers waiting at Oxford. Thu 25Sep 13:29 D800 f6.3 1/1000 iso450 70mm



Vintage Trains excursions usually put on a good show with distinctive chocolate and cream coaching stock and mostly GW locos from the Tyseley preservation centre. Also they are pleased to receive my images for the tour gallery on their web-site, so I make the effort on a thoroughly wet and miserable morning to get over to the Vale for their Cotswold Explorer as it speeds between Swindon and Didcot. Castle Class no. 5043 Earl of Mount Edgcumbe is passing my regular spot near Shrivenham - where I was shocked to find that steel piling had appeared blocking the usual wide view. Sat 04Oct 10:57 D800 f5.6 1/1000 iso2800 145mm







Today's RTC Worcester Christmas Market special is being hauled by A4 Pacific no. 60009 'Union of South Africa', the loco having recently travelled south from the NRM at York. It has a booked stop at Didcot Parkway to be passed by an HST service also heading north towards Oxford. After some minutes in the station it moves slowly towards the junction signal without any sign of the passing train. Standing wreathed in steam from the train heating it sets off again slowly but rather indecisively into the section and away under the recently replaced footbridge at Didcot North junction. Sat 29Nov 09:14 D800 f7.1 1/800 iso900 200mm



In spite of putting on a good show of steam exhaust, A4 Pacific no. 60009 'Union of South Africa' is not really working in earnest to accelerate its train away from Didcot at the North Junction. Initial fears that it was suffering from some mechanical defect were scotched when word comes through to one of my colleagues that there is a problem with the track beyond Appleford and it is proceeding under caution - so much so that the following HST service is brought to a dead stand at the junction signal coming off the Didcot avoiding line. Strange that the steamer was given priority here! Sat 29Nov 09:20 D800 f7.1 1/800 iso800 70mm



In the past the relatively few railway photographers were able to concentrate on capturing the trains, and more particularly the locomotives of the time. Nowadays with so many people engaged in the activity the fashion is to capture the surrounding context. I tend to favour the former approach but in a nod to the latter I've gone over to Bedwyn for today's Cathex to Bristol so that I could feature the boats on the canal there. Black Fives nos. 44871+45407 are working hard to keep ahead of the Plymouth HST - its Pewsey stop should give them time to clear the way at Woodborough loop. Tue 02Dec 11:54

D800 f5.6 1/1000 iso3600 52mm



Waiting on Hungerford Common for the NR track recording train and start to hallucinate that I can hear a steam engine puffing. Turns out not to be an illusion as I see steam exhaust behind the trees. Eventually traction engine "Old Timer" comes out on to the bridge on its way to the Victorian Extravaganza. I manage to capture the scene with modified settings for depth of focus and reset again for action photography just as power car no. 43962 'John Armit' comes speeding round the curve. It's a simple task to bring the two together in the digital domain for a (some) chance meeting! Fri 12Dec 12:32 D800 f6.3 1/1000 iso2800 125mm



A much brighter morning for the return of Black Fives nos. 44871+45407 with another Cathex to Bristol, a fortnight after seeing them at Bedwyn. The strong low sun leaves no option but to be on the 'right side' today, and I judge that the later time of 1 o'clock due to its starting out from deepest Kent makes the approach to Hungerford Common the best photo-location. I'm concerned about steam exhaust drifting over the scene as the locos would not be working hard enough to lift it clear, but just about get away with it. The two sets of exhaust beats intermingle for an attractive aerial effect. Tue 16Dec 13:01 D800 f7.1 1/1000 iso220 145mm

The End

Hope you enjoyed the show!