Lost Railway!

Memories of the Midland and Great Northern Joint

By R. S. McNaught

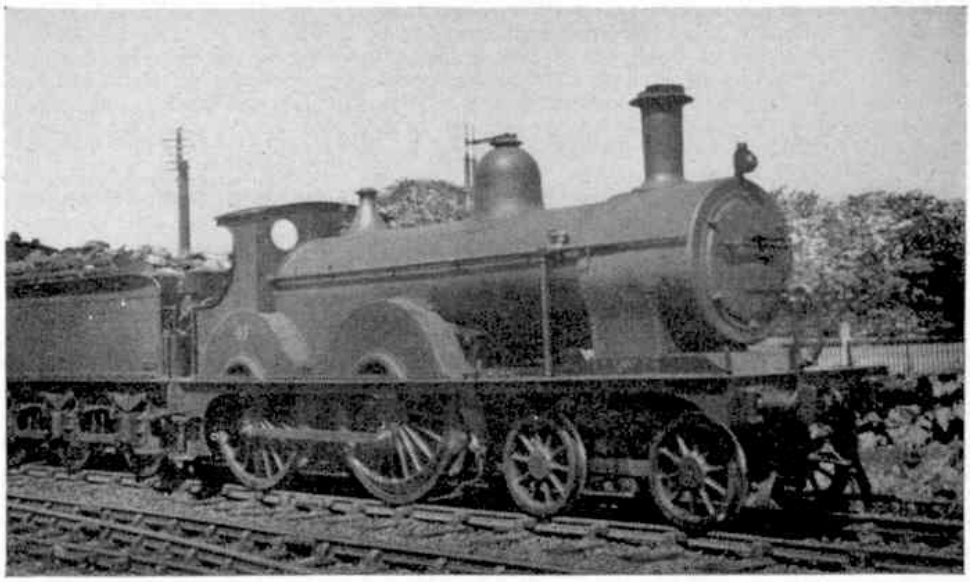
FOR many years from 1893, one way of reaching the East Coast and Norwich from the Midlands and the north was by way of the Midland and Great Northern Joint Railway. I have to say "was" because this line was largely closed down at midnight on the last day of February of the present year, and some sections of its track have already been taken up.

Over that period of nearly 70 years you could purchase a ticket at Liverpool, Manchester, or Birmingham, and several other big centres and ride across England in a comfortable "Through Carriage" excitingly roof-boarded *Cromer, Norwich, Yarmouth (Beach)* or *Lowestoft*. Even from London you could travel in a Great Northern coach marked *Cromer* from King's Cross, while from the other towns you would be seated in one liveried in either Midland, Great Central, or even London and North Western colours. In each case there was a dining or buffet car to help shorten a journey, which could be long and tedious, but was full of pleasure and interest if you appreciated the working of a most efficient and very English rural railway at its best!

The main points where the Joint line linked up with the trunk systems were well inland from the East Coast. They were Peterborough, for King's Cross, Leicester (London Road) for the Midland, and Nottingham (Midland) for both Midland and L.N.W.R. traffic. Other services from the north via Lincoln were taken over at Spalding, and some 20 miles farther east was an inter-change point with the old Great Eastern system at King's Lynn.

The M. & G.N. had a fleet of its own engines, of which it was justly proud, and these came to meet your "Through Coaches" well off their own metals. And they generally refrained from adding to the train any of their own small 4 or 6-wheel carriages, of which the Joint was not so proud; these were kept for its own local workings and were little jolters, mostly of Great Northern design, well-kept and tastefully embellished. The oldest had BLUE lining on varnished teak.

As befitted Puritan East Anglia, the compartments had plain white partitions without the pictures so universal over the years, and their steam-heating apparatus was notorious for its angry hissing. Not until the period between the World Wars did the company own bogie-fitted carriage stock, and then they acquired an assorted lot from the Midland, Great Eastern, North Eastern, and L.N.W. stables and ruined their outward good looks with a coat of vile light brown paint.

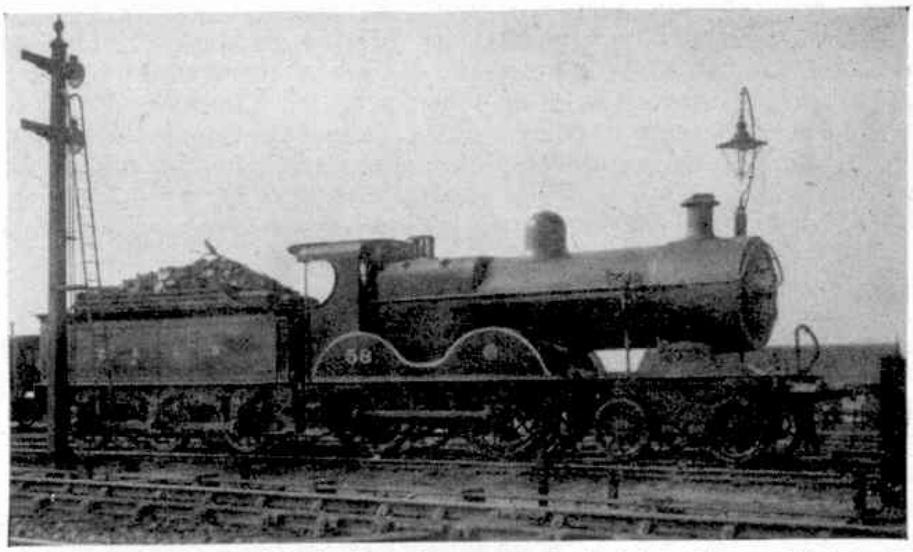


Midland and Great Northern Joint Railway 4-4-0 locomotive No. 47. The photograph, by J. P. Wilson, was taken in July 1934, when the engine was painted dark brown, unlined.

But the engines in their heyday were a different matter. Modest in size, they had a livery of "French Mustard" yellow, with artistic lining, almost exactly like the Stroudley colour scheme of the Brighton

Railway. On a rural system that owned only one tiny tunnel of 330 yards, at Bourne, and served no industrial areas, there was every incentive to clean engines so gaily decked.

Pride in the job was something to be expected when you noticed that the drivers had their names above the regulator on their footplates. The passenger stud practically throughout the Joint's history comprised 40 4-4-0's of S. W. Johnson's classic Midland design, with Salter valves mounted upon their domes and elegant brass "trumpets" enclosing a second safety valve of the lock-up type on the fire-box. Such engines simply asked for the same loving care that their larger-wheeled sisters always had on the Midland.

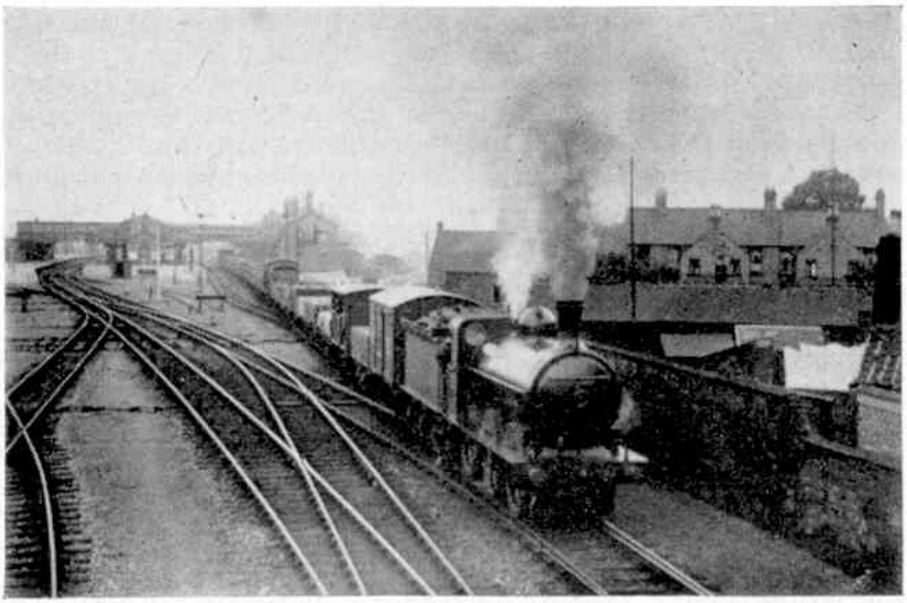


A large-boilered rebuild of the Johnson standard 4-4-0 class. Photograph by W. H. Whitworth.

The merits of the Derby-type "C Class" did not begin and end with their good looks and high maintenance. The example that took over a train for Yarmouth from the M.R. at Leicester, for instance, would have been a Yarmouth engine that had already worked over the 144¼ miles with the up train, with a brief "turn-round" of under 90 minutes for servicing and re-fuelling before returning to the coast. And this with a not inconsiderable load over a pretty tough line, to complete another day in a spell that could well have lasted into months. From 1909 onward ten of the class, which were all originally built by private firms between 1894 and 1899, were rebuilt with much larger Midland-style boilers, but were never superheated. The rebuilds became the recognised express top link.

Another batch of successful and well-loved 4-4-0's dated back to 1881-8. Although built by Beyer, Peacock & Co. for the Eastern and Midlands Railway, which was an original constituent of the Joint, they were almost identical with a contemporary class built for the old London and South Western Railway to the drawings of William Adams. These "Peacocks" were of outside-cylinder type. They steamed well and would coast for miles with closed throttle. Through rebuilding they also became rather Midlandised in outline.

No Joint engine was too proud to help with goods traffic, which was probably the main source of revenue, thanks to the great Norfolk and Lincolnshire harvests of fruit and vegetables. All the same, there were some standard freight



No. 84 Ivatt 0-6-0, on a special goods train for Sutton Bridge, is seen here leaving Spalding. Photograph by A. W. Croughton.

locomotives, 16 of Midland style and, most aptly, 12 also of H. A. Ivatt's standard Great Northern design. These latter were intended for the parent system, but were diverted to the Joint straight from their builders, Dubs and Co., in 1900.

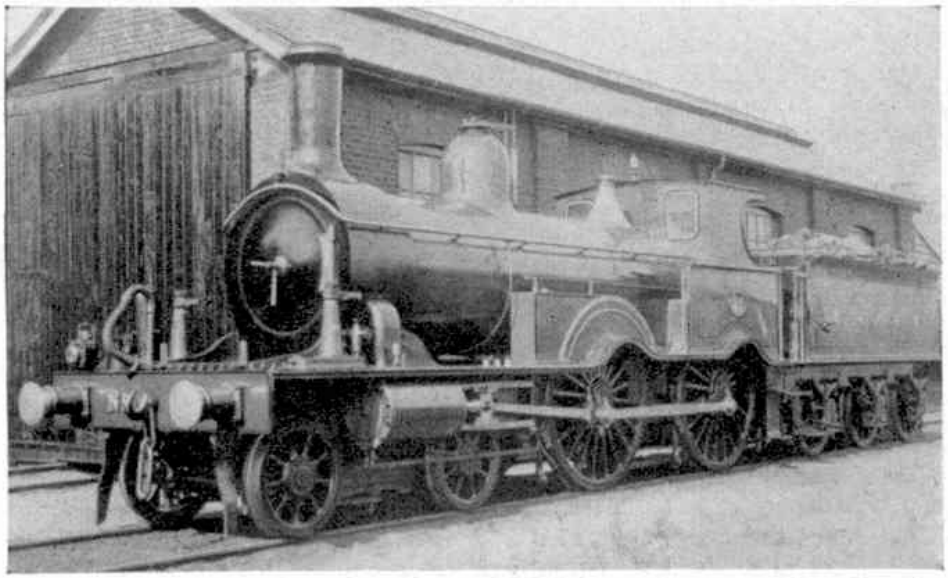
There were a few assorted tank engines, ranging from three shapely 4–4–2's that were the only engines ever built at the Joint's modest little works, at Melton Constable, to some shunters of great antiquarian interest. More than once it was found necessary to borrow a few engines from the parent companies, and three of the well-known Midland 0–4–4 tanks were kept for about ten years.

Our Yarmouth-bound carriage from Leicester, now behind its dainty yellow Joint engine, attained M. & G.N. metals at the end-on junction at Little Bytham soon after pausing at Saxby, 18¾ miles from the start. One's immediate impression was of the amount of single-line track and this, in conjunction with short rails, always made speed seem higher than it actually was. Also, it was pleasant to note the characteristic Great Northern style of "Somersault" signals, and that even on the one-line sections the track was well laid out for fast running.

The automatic tablet-exchange apparatus fitted on the side panels of the tender was the Whitaker pattern, as also used on the Somerset and Dorset Joint line, which indeed had much in common with the M. & G.N. Prior to 1907, tablets had been exchanged by hand, which was a risky and unreliable custom at anything like speed.

Other features that would have been noted were the extreme trimness of the stations and signal-boxes, the preponderance of level crossings over bridges, and the extensive use of concrete for mileposts, etc., for this line was nothing if not economical. It even transported fresh water to its crossing keepers and signal boxes out in the wilds by goods train and in ancient 4-wheel tenders the little mid-Victorian engines of which had vanished perhaps sixty years before!

You could not travel far without noticing the friendliness and spirit of "camaraderie" among M. & G.N. men. This was shown, in particular, among the enginemen, and was in part inspired by their Locomotive Superintendent, who visited every shed on the system and rightly claimed that he knew the good and bad in every individual engine. He always expected to see his personal favourites groomed to perfection and being given the "best jobs"! Melton Constable, described as a miniature Crewe in the middle of Norfolk, was the hub of the system, and the two "D's"—Derby and Doncaster — were exotic names in comparison.



No. 25, one of the 4-4-0s built from 1881 to 1888 by Beyer, Peacock and Co. for a line that became part of the Midland and Great Northern Joint Railway when it was formed in 1893. Photograph by R. S. McNaught.

As befitted such an agricultural line, the Joint Traffic officials, from country stationmasters upward, kept a hopeful and expert eye on the progress of the crops. After touring the parish and yarning with farmers, they could make a provisional estimate of the requirements of wagons, vans, sheet-covers and boxes for their station, and to many of them the weekly procession of long, often double-headed, excursion and relief trains in the summer was a worrying diversion from the REAL work.

The decline of the railway set in gradually after World War I, when lorries and road coaches began to compete for freight and passenger traffic. The engine stock began to feel its age, and the gay livery gave place to a dull but quite pleasing all-over brown, ending at last, needless to say, with plain black. (Continued on page 420)

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Until the system was taken over by the London and North Eastern Railway in 1936, it had more of a Midland atmosphere than ever before and even under the final régime it clung tenaciously to some of its old characteristic ways. Even when British Railways ordained that its carriages should be renumbered in an "80000" series, Melton found some old gilded transfers and duly placed "M & GN" in front of or above the absurd new numbers, making it look as if the Joint had more coaching stock than anybody else on earth!

What ultimately sealed the fate of our very English Joint line was, ironically enough, its possession of three impressive bridges spanning wide tidal rivers. Never very substantial, they could not carry the loads of today and the current cost of renewal was prohibitive. The first to close was that over Breydon Water, in 1953. This was a swing-bridge, much longer than the one spanning the Nene at Sutton Bridge; the third was a lengthy timber viaduct across the South Ouse outside King's Lynn. With these closed, the line ceased to be a direct link between the Midlands and the East Coast, and on most sections allowed to remain only light freight traffic will be continued.

In one of the placid Fenland dykes near Bourne, it is almost customary to see a solitary and dignified heron standing like a statue. He used to take wing at the approach of the daily Yarmouth to Birmingham express, with its eight fine L.M.S. carriages and ex-G.E.R. Buffet Car. But since February ended there is nothing more disturbing than the very occasional passing of a small green-hued Diesel Shunter ambling along with a handful of trucks.

It might make the heron wonder even more could he decipher the wording on the Diesel's works plate. It is SWINDON, 1958!

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replaced by a special pack containing a Napier rocket motor and fuel system. When using the power of both the turbojets and the rocket motor, the aircraft is expected to be able to climb up to jet-bomber cruising heights in some two minutes and to have a top speed of about 1,500 m.p.h.

The new Dinky Toys model of the P.1B Lightning has a black plastic nose-probe and is finished in silver. It bears R.A.F. roundels on the upper surface of the wings and on the sides of the cockpit and the red, white and blue motif on the tail fin.

"BRITISH RAILWAYS TODAY AND TOMORROW"

By G. Freeman Allen

(Ian Allan Ltd., 25/–)

This is not intended as a book for the railway beginner. It will rather appeal very strongly to the enthusiast who already knows something of the elements of railway practice, equipment and operation. It lives up to its title in avoiding history as such, although references to the past are necessarily included here and there. A feature of particular value is that it makes quite clear what changes are involved in the British Railways Modernisation Plan launched in 1955, and that these will succeed one another more and more rapidly as the programme advances.

There are ten chapters, making up the total of nearly 200 pages of text, giving a broad survey of each of the types of motive power now in use, steam, diesel and electric, and looking into a future in which large-scale main-line electrification is envisaged. The working of both passenger and freight trains, and the organisation of traffic under control bring the reader into touch with train movement, while the organisation and maintenance of motive power, signalling and track equipment in this changing age of railways also have attention.

Needless to say the book is well illustrated and, as befits a copious work of this kind, an index for ready reference is a valuable feature. Those who wish to look into the railway age ahead, and who require an up-to-date survey of current development, will do well to add it to their book list.

"GREAT EASTERN"

By Cecil J. Allen

(Ian Allan, 2/6d)

This is a pocket-sized, but comprehensive survey of the Great Eastern Line, an important and virtually self-contained unit of the Eastern Region of British Railways. Its title is a revival of the name of the former Company that became part of the L.N.E.R. group formed in 1923. The author himself was a Great Eastern man, well acquainted with things from the inside in both G.E.R. and L.N.E.R. periods, and so is well qualified to record events well past, while he has obviously kept a close watch on subsequent developments. In the latter the Great Eastern line has regained its individual character under B.R. policy and has witnessed something of a revolution in its organised train services.

East Anglian train services, motive power and signalling developments are the subjects of interesting chapters, while the current speedy systematic services afforded by taking the fullest advantage of modern motive power are dealt with. In the use of diesel traction, in the provision of modernised freight and marshalling yards, and in the use of electrification on the 25 kW system standardised by B.R., the Great Eastern has shown much progress.

There are plenty of good illustrations throughout and the up-to-date facts and figures relating to their favourite line will delight supporters of the Great Eastern.

"LOOKING AT BUTTERFLIES"

By L. Hugh Newman

(Collins, 8/6d)

The title of Mr. Newman's most recent book on butterflies is an apt one, for it contains 16 plates in colour of excellent reproductions of paintings of British butterflies by Anthony Moore. These form a really admirable guide to identification, and the collector is given further invaluable information on the classification of butterflies and how to find and catch them, on the care of live butterflies and of a collection.

Mr. Newman is an authority on British butterflies, and in his book he gives a wealth of essential information in a form ideal for carrying in the pocket for quick and easy reference.

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As it was not possible to publish the August issue of the *Meccano Magazine*, all current subscriptions have been automatically extended an extra month. Exceptions are those arranged through one or two London wholesale houses, who, we understand, intend to communicate with their clients direct.