



FINMERE STATION GALA 13th August 2016 - A Report by Bernie Holland (ex-RCTS)

Finmere Station can be regarded as one of the best kept secrets of modern day railway preservation, as if you don't know exactly where this former Great Central station is located, then you have little or no chance of ever finding it. Nevertheless, on Saturday 13th August 2016, I was able to complete a 50 mile road trip from my home in Wealdstone, to arrive on-site some 1¼ miles southwest of Finmere itself. This site, which accommodates a limited stretch of standard gauge track and sidings, is currently at risk of obliteration by HS2, that being a topic which continues to raise controversy to date, but need not be discussed here.



On arrival I was greeted by the sight of a large freight-container painted up in NSE colours, bearing a British Rail station sign together with Red Star -Parcels Point logo. More of this unusual object later. . . .

Another weird and wonderful 'large exhibit' was what I can only describe as a 'composite vehicle' which consisted of the front section of a London Bus (DMS 1515) along with a rear section of Electric Multiple Unit No.321434 (replete in NSE colours) both connected by a middle piece resembling a section of London Underground 'deep-level' stock. The complete item bore registration plates THM 515M which would suggest it can operate on the national road system.



Authors Note: In the appendix to this article will be found an image of EMU 321434 in the 'Silverlink' purple and green livery, photographed by me in January 2002 at my local station - Harrow and Wealdstone, which was part of the Network South East system from 1986 until 7th February 1997 when the new 'Silverlink' franchise was awarded to National Express who were to take over North London Railways Ltd, a shadow franchise created when the Network SouthEast sector of British Rail began to be prepared for privatisation on 1 April 1994. This new franchise began on 3 March 1997 and was due to end on 15 October 2006, but on 11 August 2006 the DfT extended the franchise to finish on 11 November 2007. Chris Green inaugurated the Network South East initiative at Waterloo on 10th June 1986, however, it was not until 1989 that the Class 321 25kv AC emus were first turned out from BREL, York, as 'state-of-the-art' traction capable of running at 100 mph.

The first types of the 1963 design BR(S) EMUs to be introduced were the 4 Cigs and their buffet equivalents the 4 Bigs. The first batch were assigned to the Brighton line which gave the units their designation - IG was the LBSCR telegraphic code for Brighton. Early units introduced in 1964/5 were painted BR(S) green with small yellow panels, the only 1963 design stock to be so. This generation of stock was built to the later Mk1 body design, and as an innovation to SR EMUs the two driving cars were unpowered (driving trailer composites - DTCs) and the formation includes an intermediate non-driving motor brake coach (non driving motor brake second saloon - MBSO) with two power bogies. The fourth car in the formation is a trailer second saloon (TSO) in the Cigs and a trailer buffet second (TBUF) in the Bigs. (Again, see Appendix for images of these slam-door units in their final years - and being dragged to scrap yards in South Wales)

However, this is all purely academic as the layout at Finmere is non electrified. Returning to Finmere Station we see 4-CIG 1753 carrying the special “30 Years” celebration headboard on the rear of the special train. In the back ground can be seen staff involved in preparing refreshments for the guests who will attend the ‘naming ceremony’ of 1753.





Interior of 4-CIG N.1753

Whilst all the preparations were going ahead, I decided to take a look inside the interior of 1753 and I was very impressed with how clean and tidy it was, however, to be quite realistic here, back in the day of packed commuter trains which allowed people to smoke inside, I doubt whether the interiors would have been as pristine as seen here. Another consideration was that the toilets used to empty directly down onto the tracks and the signs requesting 'please do not use the toilet whilst the train is standing in the station.

Boxes of cartons, for use in connection with the refreshments, are piled high on the seats here, which are upholstered in the 1980s Network South East "Blue Blaze" moquette.

The Inaugural Train - 4-CIG 1753 "Chris Green" headed by EPS E/D 73130



When I took this photo of the train, I had to ask the identity of the locomotive as it carried no numerals. When informed it was 73130, I remembered seeing this 'electro-diesel' many times from the platform at Kensington Olympia as it was one of a pair (along with 73118) that had been equipped with the rather unsightly Scharfenberg couplers and Air and Electro-Pneumatic Brakes for use on European Passenger Services stock moves between Waterloo International and the Eurostar Depot which was originally sited at North Pole Depot, not far from Old Oak Common. The characteristic EPS 'three rings' can be seen on the bodyside which was an identifying feature of these locos.

When I got back home much later, I managed to find a couple of transparencies in my extensive slide collection, showing 73130 when it was in everyday service. You will find these images in the Appendix to this article.

Here we see Dave East waiting for Chris Green to join him for the naming ceremony which involved the unveiling of the nameplate and plaque by a rather ingenious method. Earlier that morning I was on the other side of the coach and I observed two gentlemen filling a pouch, made from the red cloth seen here, with a fair amount of ballast. This weighed it down creating sufficient tension for the cloth to 'fly off' when the ribbons were cut by Chris, who was heard to say "I hope I don't fly off with it, when it goes!" .



The box placed on the table in the foreground here, contained a special cake commemorating the 30 years - 1986 to 2016 as the spirit of Network South East was alive and permeated this entire event.



After the naming ceremony came the customary ‘photo-call’ and here we see, from left to right, Chris Osman, Alex Forbes, Chris Green and Dave East.

Chris Osman was the “NSE 30” Project Manager, Alex Forbes was a central figure in establishing Finmere Station as the site for these operations back in 2002, Chris Green has been described as “probably the best manager British Rail never had !” and Dave East is the NSE Railway Society Chairman, who as well as assisting Chris Osman in this unique event, has also put a lot of work into the Society Web Site, which provides a wealth of information about the history of Network South East. For further details click on:

<http://www.nservers.org>



Chris Green and Dave East share a 'friendly exchange' as preparations are made NOT to cut the cake yet - as the buffet is about to be declared open.

THE CAKE !



“Ode to a Cake” by Bernie Holland

“Oh Great Cake of Enn Ess Eee

30 Years have passed and We

Stand together Side by Side

Spreading Friendship far and Wide”

And then as the clock struck eleven, the 'Buffet' was declared open and everyone had to chance to share their interests with each other and have a bite to eat under the great red gazebo which stood on the island platform that, in days gone by, would serve the trains of the former Great Central Railway which worked up and down between London Marylebone and Nottingham Victoria.



Now let us return to that freight-container we saw earlier - this served as the Museum and perhaps the most striking feature was the giant photographic print which opened out for all to see.



Chris was marvelling at the mechanics of this piece, commenting on how ingenious the load-bearing structure functioned - and below, Dave stands proudly beside the massive print which had been specially produced by a company in Lancing.

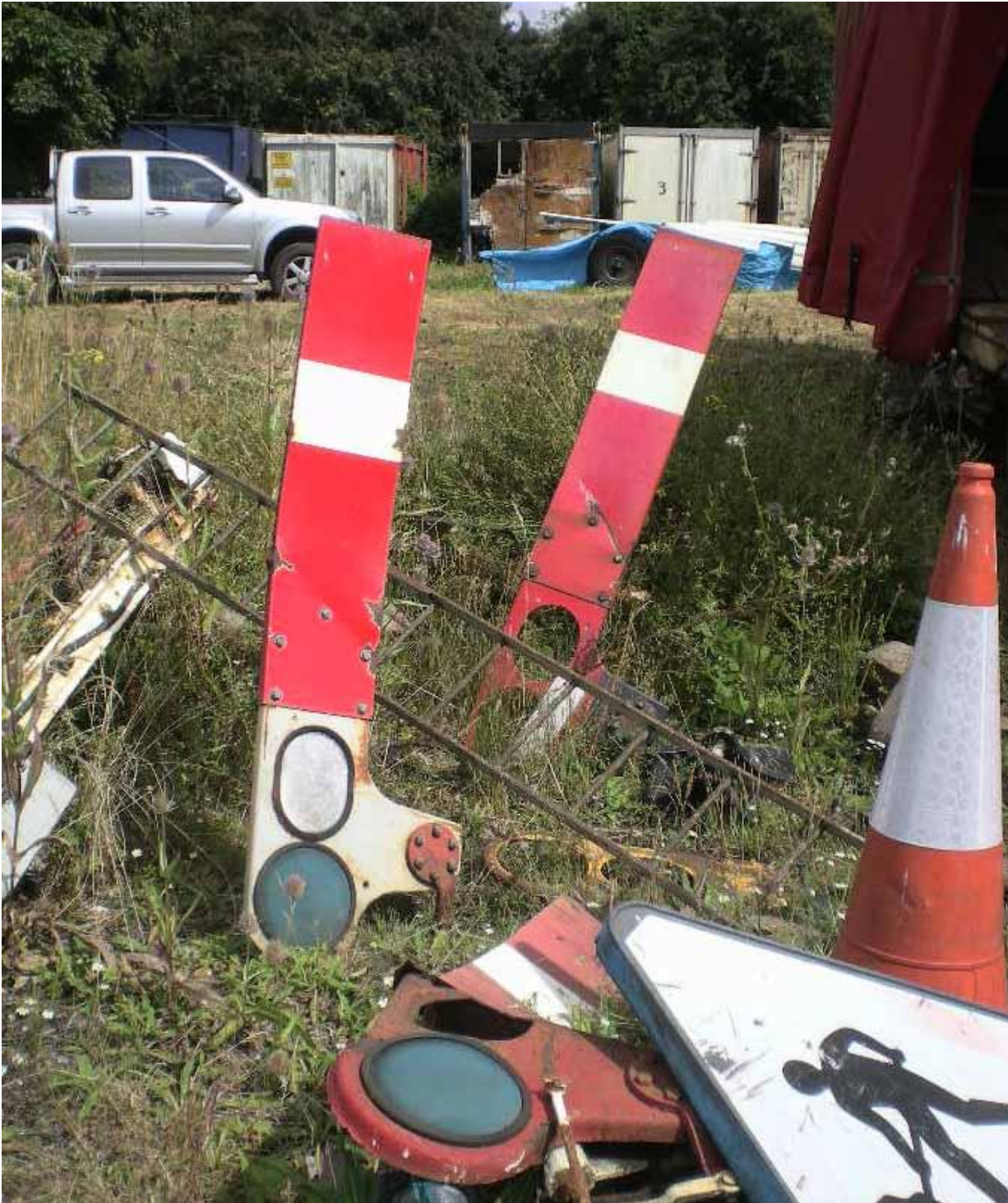


“IZZY WIZZY LET’S GET BIZZY !”



I had the opportunity to speak for a while with a charming young lady by the name of Izzy who gave a fascinating account of how 4-CIG 1753 was moved back from a scrapyards in Caerwent, South Wales, and refurbished for use by the society. After we had finished talking, I walked away thinking “this lady is a credit to the world of railway preservation.”

And so, after all the excitement, some time to wander around the site at Finmere.



Some old upper-quadrant 'home' semaphore arms dumped unceremoniously. These items should really be kept safe from the ravages of the weather, as they are valuable components of a possible future signalling project.



Electro-Diesel No.73130 prepares to depart on another run to the buffers and back. The actual running line was not much more than a few hundred yards in length, however, it was enough to give the impression that you were actually going somewhere.



For those of an 'agricultural' persuasion, the Bicester Vintage Tractor Club was very well represented with a substantial number of exhibits.

Tractors



And a steam traction engine !



“Wallace & Stevens” built in 1916 - 100 years old and ‘not out’

And so to say farewell - and make my way back home.

APPENDIX of SUPPLEMENTARY IMAGES

On arriving home, I immediately checked my catalogue of 35mm transparencies, which runs to around 40,000 items covering nearly every class of steam, diesel and electric locomotive, spanning a period of some 180 years from Brunels Broad Gauge right up to the present day. Sure enough I found two images showing 73130 in days gone by.

The first image shows 73130 in “Intercity” livery bearing the name “City of Portsmouth” heading a train of tank wagons, forming the 08:28 Fawley Oil Refinery to Hollybourne emerging from Pirbright Tunnel on 30th July 1991. The ‘pilot’ locomotive is 73108 seen here in what was known as either the ‘Dutch’ or the ‘Engineers’ livery.



Class 73 Electro-Diesels at Kensington Olympia

The second image of 73130 was taken at what used to be a 'photographic hotspot' this being the northbound platform at Kensington Olympia. I used to meet many railway photographers here, and we were never troubled by over-zealous station staff !

The pair of EPS Class 73s is seen working light en route to the Eurostar Depot at North Pole Junction. 73130 leads 73118 at 11:56 hrs on 2nd November 1999. At this time it was not uncommon to see these locomotives working empty stock movements of Eurostar Class 373 fixed formation electric multiple units. Capable of working either by drawing power from the third rail, or by using diesel traction on unelectrified routes (such as Finmere !) these were versatile and reliable locomotives. Their hey-day of passenger working was on the trains from Victoria to Gatwick Airport.



Silverlink Trains at Harrow & Wealdstone

Here is the picture of 321434 which I mentioned earlier, seen on a Euston to Rugby “Silverlink” service calling at Harrow & Wealdstone at 14.22 hrs on 3rd January 2002. Note the wooden cladding which was erected at this time when the old ‘mail chutes’ were being converted into lifts for wheelchair users and others with similar mobility problems.



When I took this photograph at my local station in 2002, little did I imagine that some 14 years later I would see the front end of it incorporated as a part of that ‘composite’ vehicle at Finmere Station.

Connex South Central Trains



Connex South Central liveried 421/3 (4-CIG) EMU 1734 passes Christchurch with a Gatwick to Bournemouth service on 8th August 1998. This picture was taken by my friend John Chalcraft who lives in the West Country. This 4-car unit is virtually identical to the example preserved at Finmere.

There were a number of reasons why these, and other emu types were withdrawn and condemned during the modernisation of the early years of the millennium, one being that passengers could alight from these trains whilst they were still moving. Health and Safety decided to bring an end to the era of 'slam-door' stock by stipulating that new designs had to have doors controlled only by the driver.

4 CIG at Hounslow - 2005

Here is an example of a Class 421/8 (4-CIG) EMU in Network South East Livery. 1398 is seen on a down train calling at Hounslow at 11:46 hrs on 5th February 2005. However, the actual reason for visiting this station was photograph a pair of 73s which were working a railtour from Crewe to Liverpool Street - this was just an 'incidental' shot, which as things turned out, has come in very handy in illustrating this article. Notice the cast-concrete footbridge, typical of Southern Region station furniture.



Even at this time (2005) the writing was on the wall for the 'slam-door' emus, as the railway privatisation brought about a programme of investment in more modern stock. During the following couple of years, there was the wholesale withdrawal of many types of 'slam-door' stock which were rapidly being supplanted by new designs. However, railway observers were generally less than enthusiastic about what was being described as the 'new age of plastic'. The old stock rapidly disappeared to storage sites, one of the largest being near Shoeburyness, from where the condemned stock would be hauled to various scrapyards in South Wales.

6V91 Shoeburyness to Newport “Scrappex”



Here is a view I took at West Drayton at 13:45 hrs on Monday 6th March 2006 showing EWS liveried 66019 heading a rake of withdrawn Connex and Southern emu stock en route from Shoeburyness to Newport - presumably Cashmore's yard.

The stock forming this consist is as follows:

76085 (1745)
76031 (1745)
76049 (1709)
76888 (3568)
76066 (1724)
76072 (1740)
76103 (1709)
76878 (3585)
76051 (1735)
76121 (1737)
76129 (1738) and
76877 (3565)

And here is the 'going-away' shot of the same train taken from the other side of the bridge with the train approaching West Drayton Station on the down-slow line, where it runs parallel with the Grand Union Canal. Again the date is Monday 6th March 2006. Izzy informed me that 1753 ended up at Caerwent and it would probably have been towed west in a consist not unlike what we see here.

Quite apart from the main subject here, this view has now changed with the electrification of Paddington to Heathrow Airport - and subsequently the major electrification of the Western Main Line to Bath, Bristol and beyond.



And so I would like to thank Chris Green and all his colleagues on the NSE 30 Celebrations for organising and providing such an enjoyable day out at Finmere for all concerned.

Bernie Holland - Harrow - Monday 15th August 2016.