

Snapshot of a Beattie on the Main Line

By Tony Davies

Well, only just! Those of you who managed a ride in the brake van of the daily goods train from Wadebridge to Wenford Bridge, in Cornwall—during the latter-day heyday of that line—were lucky.

On my own run in August 1961, Beattie 240WT No. 30585 went along quite gaily on the outward run of some 15 minutes or so up the Camel valley. A three-mile stretch, which included a short 20 mph slack, was covered at an average speed of 33 mph.

So while we hoped for “a bit of a gallop” on the way home, alas, we had to stop to service the wayside level crossings on the way! Then, of course, there were the many chance workings from Wadebridge to Padstow with the Bodmin branch train in an emergency. A browse through magazines of that period may help recall.

Going a bit further back down memory lane, well, there was a Railway Enthusiasts’ Club special from Andover to Bulford Camp in May 1955. This Army camp, as some of you would know, is near Grateley on the Southern West of England main line, but there was no main line “running” outward! Plus, there were some stiff banks to climb on the branch. But on the return run—all downhill from Grateley—the crew of No. 30587 seemed quite happy with a speed of around 36 mph.

Then there was “the trip to end all trips” in December 1962, when two Beatties—nos. 30585 and 30587—were turned out to work the RCTS/SLS tours of six carriages on South Western suburban lines from Waterloo—on two separate Sundays! Again, a little gentle research will uncover the details.

The moment of “crowning glory” came after a visit to Hampton Court, when, back at the junction, the train was turned on to the fast line, rather than the slow, on both occasions. This was a matter of operating convenience: reversal at Wimbledon. On the first Sunday, they trundled along at just under 30 mph all the way, but on the final trip a signal check approaching Surbiton provided impetus for “a bit of running”. From 20 mph, the two Beatties were up to 30 mph by Berrylands, then from 32 to 34 mph to Raynes Park. That was some eight minutes of sustained steaming.

While I am sure there may have been other similar occasions over the intervening years, there was another unusual occasion in July 2003. *Review*—the journal of the Friends of the National Railway Museum—for Autumn 2003 (No.105, p.11) has the detail. With the retirement of Richard Gibbon from the museum, there was a need for “something special” to mark the occasion, and No. 30587 just happened to be on NRM premises!

Those “in the know” could write more. I can only recall a strange sensation that “something was up” at the museum in the week before the trip. This special involved a low-loader trip to Pickering and then, with only a single carriage (W80974W), a run from there to Grosmont and back, with Driver Cubitt. Of course, the 25 mph limit was rigorously kept; nevertheless, those who were present had a great day. Finally, for those for whom “the men” mean the most—and with “Wadebridge memories”—there is a photograph of the late Roy Wilce in *Review* No.102, p.6. We saw him at York for the 2004 “Railfest” too (see also *Review* No.111, p.25).

In closing, a similar occasion comes to mind. That of M7 044T No. 30053 running from Woking to Waterloo in March 1995, on the slow line to Hampton Court Junction, to allow Clan Line to overtake us! Although signal checks were bound to follow, we finished the day with a spanking 45 mph through Clapham Junction!