

W H Pettifer Sequel to "Tempus Fugit" (Vol 03.01)

Mr Pettifer attached this sequel to his previous effort and it answers some of the social history and personal questions that are prompted by the original essay.

He gave no title or date to this document. It was produced in the same manner as "Tempus Fugit" and I have therefore adopted the same technique of copying the original script and punctuation except that wherever there are references to imperial measure or pre decimal money I have spelt them out rather than use the old abbreviations. JRJ 01.06

I have been asked by a reader of the foregoing if I could tell a little more of the circumstances in which I found myself that caused me to come over to the S.M.J. Line, and the methods of signalling employed on the line and the wages current at that time.

To apprehend it properly, I was very interested in church work at that time and attended Primrose Hill Congregational Chapel at Northampton. Amongst my duties I used to act as usher or sides-man and welcome people as they arrived. One day a young lady came and stood very perplexed in the church doorway, and I approached her to help her. She explained that she was in service with a C of E parson who had just moved into the town and, as she was of a different church, being Congregational, wished to attend her own form of worship. We were a "young" church in as much as the whole of the members were on the younger side and, at that time, very go-ahead in that the members helped to run the church, other than the actual ministry or the financial side.

I made her welcome and, after the service made sure that she did not go before I was able to introduce her to some of the young members of her own age. She was soon brought into the thickness of the church's activities. I forgot to mention that, though I could not play a note of music, I loved it and when the church at Towcester held its anniversary I was invited over to this girl's home to meet her parents and to attend the services. At her home I also met a very elderly lady who I was told was the girl's grandmother. The grandmother, seeing my interest in music, invited me to spend the week-end at her home if I could get away for that week-end, when the choir of her church would be holding their choir festival. After a little correspondence I managed to fix things up to travel to Stratford-upon-Avon for the weekend in September and, on the platform to meet me was another grandchild, who was to become my wife. Now began the difficulties, as we could only meet at week-ends about once every three weeks, and as I was 28 my lady a little younger, we felt that time would pass us by, as Granny was not getting any younger and really ought not to be left, things presented a nasty problem. It was finally agreed that we should get married and live separately until we could get together or until I could see an opportunity of getting nearer, the latter being a very forlorn hope it seemed. The only hope was the demise of Granny, but it is surprising how the wheels of fate turn. I was earning 38 shillings a week and sent my 10 shillings to my wife, paying 25 shillings per week board to my landlady. I would like to put it on record that if it hadn't been for my landlady I might have gone wrong as she adopted me in the true sense, in as much as whenever any repairs were needed they were never missed and when the clothes went

too bad, then she informed me in plenty of time and never asked me to get new clothes unless unavoidable. You may wonder how I got the extra money. You see, I was on a shift system and later on I was promoted to examiner. I started as a wagon greaser and this raised my wages to the astronomical figure of 38 shillings per week and later to 42 shillings per week, as they had decided to couple our wages to the cost-of-living index. My wedding present from the railway was a drop of four shillings per week, as the index had fallen to basic and, under the agreement, when the cost-of-living index fell to the base the wages would be pegged to the pre-war or fixed figure, [note 1] and so I married on the magnificent sum of 38 shillings per week. Within a few weeks the staff had to be cut down and I, being the only one in lodgings and away from home, was selected to move to other lodgings and was transferred to Rugby, which was earlier (before my marriage) my home. This I did not mind as not having to work week-ends meant that I could get home every week-end with a reduction in my lodgings, I was able to give my wife a few more shillings each week, together with the fact that I finished work at midday each Saturday until Monday morning. I used to travel by train on Saturday midday and return to Rugby by Midland Red [note2] to Leamington and then to Rugby by train.

One day I found out about a man living in Rugby in the same job as myself, but having to travel to Coventry every day.

Now Coventry was as far, if not farther, away from Stratford but there was a regular train from Leamington which would get me to Coventry in time for my daily work, if only we could get the railway to agree to our swapping. The railway fare from Milverton Station to Coventry was 13 shillings and 11 pence per three months (we were allowed a ticket at a quarter of the workman's fare), and also I should be allowed four miles free travel and so I would only pay for six & half miles travel at a quarter fare, hence the cheap travel. What I did not know was that my opposite had many dislikers at Rugby and so our request was refused. Unfortunately, or in my case fortunately, my opposite was suffering from consumption and within a few weeks was dead. I took advantage of this position and re-applied for the vacancy, and was immediately given it. Imagine the joy! At last we were able to live together as man and wife instead as on a lodger sort of existence.

One incident occurred during my travelling to Rugby. On the Sunday night I was travelling to Leamington by the bus and, as we passed through Barford, the flood waters burst out of a field to a depth of two or three feet. All the members of the church were cut off from their homes and I felt very sorry for them, as we were travelling on a minimum fare bus and the conductor had to charge them 6 pence for about a hundred feet through the flood. Of course, many had only brought their collection with them and so had no money. The force of the water was so strong it even swayed the bus.

I used to leave home by cycle at 6.45am., catching the train at Milverton at 7.40am., leaving Coventry at 5.05pm., arriving home at about 6.30pm. for my evening meal.

On Sundays there were no suitable trains and so I used to do one of two things. Either travel overnight and sleep rough in the cabin or cycle all the way 21 miles in the early hours. I remember having a puncture on one of these early trips and had to use the charge room at Warwick Police Station to give me enough light. This was about 2.30am., as I had to be at work at 4.00am.

The work at Coventry was very interesting but I wanted to get nearer home and at Coventry I was able to see the vacancy list. One vacancy kept coming up regularly and never seemed to be filled

up. This was at the village of Ettington (Eatington alternative spelling). *[note 3]* I applied for the same, the signalman, and knowing this village I could well understand why, as it was very lonely and very little life for a young man just beginning his life, as no person was allowed at the time to be near the moving train unless they were over twenty and one could only get to being a signalman by working one's way upward, starting at the lowest rung of the ladder. The only exception to the foregoing rule was that position of train recorder at a busy box. One must understand that a signalman at a very busy box would pass anything up from 60 to 100 trains per hour at the rush hours and so they employed a young lad whose job it was to write down the time and description of each train as it was called out by the signalman and in his spare time act as tea boy. These boys usually worked until they were twenty, when they would apply for signalman's post in the lower grades. The lowest being class 4G, the next being 4P, meaning that your box dealt with only goods trains, or was allowed passenger status, the difference being two shillings per week in your pay packet. For instance, at my time, the rate for a 4G was 48 shillings per week whilst a 4P was 50 shillings.

Ettington was rated as 4P but there was no night work and so your wages were exactly 50 shillings and no extras. 6.00am until 2.00pm and the next week 2.00pm to 10.00pm. This was very poor pay for a young single chap who would have to pay lodgings of 25 shillings or 30 shillings per week and then keep himself, and perhaps travel home at the weekends. No Sunday work, and so they would have to make their own amusement. It didn't run to a lashing out at the pub after one had bought a few smokes and perhaps some new clobber. But this would just suit me, as I should only have to cycle five miles each way and my wife would have all my money to mix in with what she had previously managed to earn. At this time my family had started and we were the proud parents of a daughter. The 50 shillings would be a rise to what I was getting and so things began to look rosy, so I applied for the post. The next thing I knew was when I was called into the office as an inspector wished to see me. Not understanding, I went with fear and trembling, wondering what I had done wrong, this time, and a very friendly gentleman introduced himself as Inspector Aberfield. He questioned me about the signal box work and of course I was absolutely ignorant of it. I didn't know that one was expected to know the rules of the "block-signalling" method. And also the single line method of signalling, before one applied. Of course I had never even seen a rule book of these things, let alone learnt them. He was kindness itself, as I was under the impression that the powers that be would teach me when I had got the job. He talked to me as to why I wanted the job and I told him and he promised to send me the two books, and gave me permission to go into a box at Coventry and get the signal-man to help me, and he would come again in three weeks to see how I was getting on, as if I could give him fair answers, he would pass me and let me go to Ettington to learn more and then take over the box. I must have satisfied him because the next thing I knew I had to go to Derby to satisfy the traffic grade Inspector, and then I would be transferred from the Carriage and Wagon dept to the traffic and be transferred as a porter to Stratford-on-Avon for a week to make the grade, Fortunately for me I never had to go to Ettington as a signalman, as the man at Kineton failed his eyesight test and I immediately was sent to Kineton. After about three weeks, I was passed out and took over the box, another rise in as much as at Kineton they worked round the clock, meaning I got extra money for night work.

I am not going to dwell on the week at Stratford, because I may have some to say about that place later on, but I want to go on with the signal work at Kineton. Nearly all of the line was single track, *[note 4]* with crossing points at each station, and so we got an up and a down line in the platforms. Kineton box was on the "up" side, opposite the cattle pens and on the other side to the office. This

was very good for when any officers of the company arrive they could not overlook the work of the box from the office. Also, we were unlucky sometimes, in as much as station-masters did not stay long, using it as a staging post for promotion, and in doing so often tried to show their ability of management by throwing their weight about. (Not physically, but officially), and as we were all older than them, it did not pay. Often they found it necessary to apologise to us, and it toned their tendency to bossiness down to manageable levels. You see, they also were beginners in the ladder and had to learn. Now let's get on with the box. As I already stated it was on the "up" platform, and the floor level was four steps up from the platform, On entering on one's right, along the wall was a large locker, a gap for the coal bucket and then the stove. Next to the stove was a space which we filled with a Windsor Arm Chair, next the desk and in the corner a clock of which I shall speak more later. Turning the corner, were two iron castings of a most peculiar shape, so I will try to describe one, as there were two more of similar construction the other end. Imagine the ordinary wooden spoon as that will give a good starting line to try to describe them. They were about 4 feet and 6 inches tall, and the stem or handle being square, and having two parallel slots down to the base. The head, or bowl, was about the upper part of 18 inches, having a circular slot cut out for one quarter of its face. In the head was a rotating portion or rotor. This moved when the signalman wished to dispatch a train, as NO train could proceed without a train staff [note 5] or pilot aboard, [note 6] to prevent a collision on the single line, each instrument was controlled by the signalman at the other end, [note 6] and two staffs could not be taken out at the same end, or opposite ends simultaneously. I do not understand electricity but it is something to do with parallel and series coupling of the instruments. The lower portion contained the spare staffs, as there was a tendency for more trains to run one-way than the other, and then the linesman [note 7] would have to come and adjust the instruments by fiddling the mechanism, and taking some of the staffs to the other end of the section. [note 8] This was controlled very carefully, as all staffs were numbered and each number was entered into the daily logbook at each end, and signed for by the signalman. To return to the box, leaving the instruments we find another large locker and the corner, turning along the platform front there was nothing alongside the wall and coming to the corner was another locker and two more instruments, the second one being a smaller version and put in after I went there, and during my term, then the door by which we entered, but as I have said there was nothing alongside the front wall. There was a very big piece of mechanism all the way along, and penetrating the floor down to ground level this was the frame. 24 large levers above the floor and a very complicated combination lock below, giving admittance to the station for the trains. The red levers were the signals, the black ones the points and the blue ones the special locking bars, which prevented the signalman forgetting that a train or wagon was too near the crossing place for comfort. Any levers that may be in excess of requirements were painted white. Each signal-lever had its name painted on it and what signals, AND IN WHAT ORDER, they must be pulled in order to pull that signal off. The locking below the floor preventing any side-stepping, as it acted as a huge combination safe lock does. Now to show how the whole worked in practice. One wished to send a train to the next box, one would ring that box with the telegraph key which gave one strike at the next box each time it was depressed. One always gave one ring and had to wait until the next signalman answered it by repetition. Then one would describe the train one was offering [note 9] and if he could accept it, that is the way was clear, he would repeat the bell-code and, holding down on the last beat, would electrically release the lock on the opposite instrument, so allowing the first man to roll out one of the staffs, at the same time locking both instruments until that staff had been replaced in one or other of those instruments, so bringing the instruments into series or parallel, whichever it is that put them right. All I know is that the lineman used to say "bring them into phase". When the train left me, or passed me, I had to give two beats on the bell, and that

would warn the next signaller to get the next section clear. One may think it would be possible to put a staff in the wrong instrument and so cause a smash. This is impossible as all staffs have rings at varying distances apart making virtually a Yale type key, only able to unlock the correct instrument. All staffs have four or more rings erratically spaced, so forming a key. There were two kinds of staff in use at Kineton, the later one a key token and, as its name suggests, something in the shape of a key, and for comfort was exchanged in a pouch with a leather covered cane ring, but while I was there this was only brought in with the building of Burton Dassett as a full block post, before it was only a siding worked by rolling the staff into a box which released the frame levers. The staff we used up until then was a piece of steel pipe, named at the end with the name of the section at the end, and the rings were spaced at varying intervals, so preventing one section staff being illegally used in another.

Let me go on to the use of this station in its hey-day. Nearby was the kennels of the hunt, and, as motor horse-boxes were not thought of in my time, horses were despatched by train, both to meets and also the sales. In this measure a siding was built under the bridge, holding 11 horse-boxes, and capable of being gravitated into the platform and loaded off that, instead of putting them singly into the dock. This would have necessitated an engine standing by whilst we could drop out 11 horse-boxes, and load them at leisure until it was time to start the train. This caused a mystery for me, as this small siding had the name of "Cramptons" and I did not realise until many years later when I found out that Crampton was one of the early directors of the very early line. [note 10] This brings to mind the story of why two short sidings behind the box were always called "Willoughby's Sidings". I shall mention this again, but it will not hurt to mention it here. A charge of a few shillings per day was raised, owing to the congestion in the usual siding, owing to the delay of customers emptying the wagons, and one of the offenders was the Lord Willoughby who, being master of the hunt and was one of the largest customers, thought he should have preferential treatment [note 11] When he found out his mistake, he had these special sidings built on his own land and insisted that all his traffic should be located there, so that there could be no demurrage charges.

The original copy of this document ends here in mid sheet without date or author's endorsement. There are a number of matters that the author says he will come back to or that he infers he has more to say upon. The clock at Kineton is dealt with in "Tempus Fugit" so Mr Pettifer may have had second thoughts on that one. It is possible that he continued this essay but I have never come across a completed volume or that he simply gave up at this point and never returned to it.

Notes on Text by J R Jennings

Note 1. Pre war refers to the Great War 1914-1918

Note 2. "Midland Red" was the trading name of the Birmingham and Midland Motor Omnibus Co who held the public road carriage licence for many bus routes in the Midlands.

Note 3. The author is correct in pointing out the earlier spelling of Ettington. I have never found it used in any official railway document published by the East and West Junction Railway, the SMJ or LMS.

Note 4. This reference to “line” is a general one describing the nature of the whole of the former SMJ system.

Note 5. The train staff is (usually) a steel and brass device bearing the names of the two places between which it authorises passage of trains. The Electric Train Staff system ensured that only one staff for each section of line could be issued at any one time and therefore possession of the correct staff for a section was an absolute assurance that no other traffic could occupy the section at the same time. It was also known as a token or tablet depending upon its physical appearance and a numbered quantity for each section were retained in the instruments as described. The actual type varied depending on the supplier of the equipment but the method of use was similar and as the author states it was not uncommon to find different patterns in use on adjacent sections of line. During its history the SMJ line was re-equipped with different types of instruments at various times. The original signalling was supplied to the East & West Junction Railway by the Railway Signal Co of Liverpool and was in general use on the line until the LMS upgraded the route in the mid 1920's. This upgrade allowed the line to be worked more economically at times of lighter traffic by introducing “long” and “short” staff sections. This caused some upheaval in the smaller boxes on the line as they had to accommodate four instead of two of the large instruments. I know for sure that Byfield and possibly other boxes had to have small extensions to their structure to allow for this. Mr Pettifer arrived at Kineton after this upgrade and I suspect that the LMS had retained the original Railway Signal Co instruments (they being the large ones mentioned) for the “long” sections to Fenny Compton and Stratford and introduced new ones of a different pattern for the new “short” sections to Burton Dassett and Ettington. For those not familiar with this form of signalling there are many standard reference works but I will end this note by pointing out that where “long” and “short” sections appeared to duplicate part of each other it was not possible to release a conflicting “short” staff if a “long” staff had been issued or vice versa. The advantage to the railway was the saving in signalmen's wages and quicker passage of traffic as every staff change over meant a reduction in train speed.

Note 6. “other end” meaning the signalman in the next box open for traffic along the route. A Pilot was a person who was appointed by the issue of an appropriate form to accompany each train through a section of track if the instruments had failed and a staff could not be issued. The pilotman was in effect a human token, as only one man could be appointed for each affected section trains had to pass in turn. As the lineman would probably be involved in the repair of any failed instruments the pilotman was usually a senior man with good knowledge of the route very often the local inspector.

Note 7. Line or Linesman (the author uses both terms) This man was the technician responsible for the maintenance of the signal and associated telegraph instruments together with their connections to the overhead pole and wire network connecting the signal boxes in a given area. They worked a specific stretch of line in the same way that their counterparts on the track gangs did. If there was an easy road route between locations they would often use a bicycle, if not they might use a four wheel ganger's trolley to push ladders and tools along the line.

Note 8. For most normal traffic purposes the imbalance of movements along the single track would iron itself out over a weekly cycle and a sufficient number of staffs would be made to allow for this. Mr Pettifer mentions the problem because he would have experienced it during WW2 when the SMJ route was used extensively for the movement of troops and military materials. Sudden flows of

trains in one direction would cause all of the staffs for a section to end up at one end of the section fairly quickly. I was told by another ex SMJ man that during the war if it was known that such traffic was coming the operating authorities would try to arrange for a spare engine to carry back the staff immediately to the opposite end and then couple up to the next train to get back and repeat the process for as long as necessary. This was a strain on already depleted resources and often it would be necessary for the lineman to isolate the affected instruments and then carry back a quantity of staffs to replenish the depleted instrument. Needless to say there were strict rules about such procedures that caused hold ups to traffic.

Note 9. The type of train was described by a combination of rings and spaces on the bell. Each time the telegraph key was pressed as well as giving one ring on the opposite bell it also released the electric circuit in that instrument to allow the removal of a staff (if one was not already out) so on the last stroke of the acknowledging code the accepting signalman would hold down his key for a few seconds to enable his mate at the other end to remove the staff from the locking mechanism on his instrument.

Note 10. See note 20 on "Tempus Fugit" regarding Crampton

Note 11. The Lord Willoughby de Brooke was a large landowner in the area and had been a prominent shareholder of the SMJ before the grouping in 1922. No doubt in SMJ days a blind eye would be turned to any demurrage that his wagons might incur. The LMS would not of course have any regard to his former situation and would extract revenue where they could. He built the sidings on his own land in the early 1920's to avoid the levy of such charges.

Kineton Signal Box

Kineton Box was like most East & West Junction Railway boxes was equipped by the Railway Signal Co and the locking frame which was in use until 1965 was made by them. The lever plates mentioned were in fact engraved brass plates with rounded ends and were bolted to each lever. The engraved details showed the lever number and description followed in smaller type face by the numbers of corresponding locking or point levers. Several of these plates from Kineton and Byfield are in my Railwayana Collection together with one of the box name boards.

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