

A NORTHAMPTONSHIRE LOCOMOTIVE MYSTERY

Early Days on the Northampton & Banbury Junction Railway

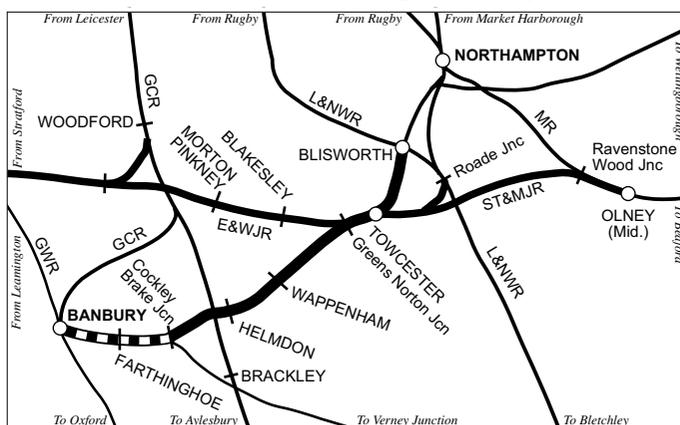
BARRY TAYLOR

Early local newspaper archives can often be a rich source of information for the railway historian, particularly as they can provide first hand reports of lines during their planning and construction periods, and also useful details of the usual opening day ceremonies, and early passenger services and facilities. Having said that, such accounts do understandably tend to focus on the aspects of the railway that were of most interest to the travelling public and it is unusual to find much in terms of detail of the operation of the railway, and even more unusual to learn anything of the locomotives used on the line. However, whilst researching some Northamptonshire newspaper archives for my article in *RA29*, 'A French Farce in West Northamptonshire – new light on an early East & West Junction locomotive', I was agreeably surprised to also find a series of advertisements for the sale of railway equipment on the neighbouring Northampton & Banbury Junction Railway. These, rather unusually, do provide an insight into the early locomotive history of that line, at a time when the euphoria of opening had quickly been replaced by the grim reality of a chronic lack of finance. They also reveal intriguing details of two hitherto largely unnoticed locomotives that operated on the line in its earliest days.

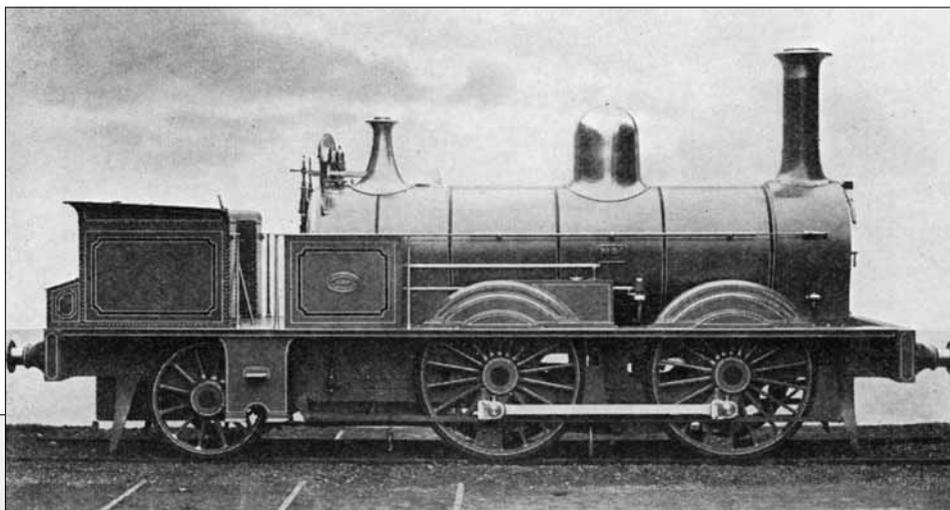
A railway between Northampton and Banbury had been planned as long ago as 1849, when an act was passed, with the support of the L&NWR, for a line from Gayton Wharf, near Blisworth, to Cockley Brake, where it would connect with the Buckinghamshire Railway route from Bletchley to Banbury. The L&NWR had agreed to build and lease the line, which would have enabled through connection between Northampton and Banbury, by using a few miles of existing L&NWR track at either end of the route to reach the two towns. There was, however, insufficient interest shown in the proposal, the company was unable to raise the necessary capital and the scheme was allowed to lapse. Before long, the realisation that Northamptonshire was rich in iron ore deposits prompted a further attempt to connect the area with Banbury and a new act for a Northampton & Banbury Junction Railway received the Royal Assent on 22nd July 1863. A variation from the previous proposal was that the line was to run from a junction with the western side of the L&NWR main line at Blisworth, rather than connecting with the Blisworth to Northampton branch, which itself departed from the opposite side of the station. This decision meant that through running to Northampton was precluded and shunting movements through exchange sidings, and then across the main line, would be necessary. Although a later application did provide for a short

spur bridging the L&NWR at Gayton and linking directly to the Northampton branch, the earlier decision considerably hampered the development of the line as a through route for Northampton traffic.

There were however, greater ambitions and these were reflected in an application in early 1865 for powers to extend the line to Chipping Norton and Blockley, and then again in 1866 for a further push westwards to Ross on Wye, bringing the furnaces of South Wales firmly into sight. It was also decided that with these new objectives, a title of merely 'The Northampton & Banbury Junction Railway' was no longer appropriate and a change was made to the far more expansive Midland Counties & South Wales Railway. Against this background of unbounded optimism, construction had proceeded apace and the Blisworth to Towcester section was opened on 30th April 1866. Unfortunately, a matter of just a few weeks later, the collapse of the major banking firm of Overend & Gurney was to send shock waves through the financial world and inevitably stopped many early railway schemes, including the MC&SWR, quite literally dead in their tracks. The contractor for the extension beyond Towcester, a William Shrimpton, was quickly declared



A sketch map showing the NB&JR system and connecting lines. The first section from Blisworth to Towcester was opened in 1866 but construction then ceased about one mile west of Towcester. The remainder of the route through Wappenham and Helmdon to Cockley Brake Junction was not completed until 1872. The East & West Junction Railway connected to the N&BJR at Greens Norton Junction, just west of Towcester, from 1873 but the eastwards extension of the Stratford, Towcester & Midland Junction Railway to Ravenstone Wood did not appear until 1891. There was also a halt provided at Tiffield, halfway between Blisworth and Towcester, for a short time around 1870. It will also be noted that the N&BJR did not reach either Northampton or Banbury with its own rails, although having running powers into both over the L&NWR branches.



LEFT: The N&BJR were unable to complete the purchase of their original 1866 order for Neilson 0-4-2 tank and tender locomotives, and two of each were later sold direct to the Caledonian Railway – not, as previously suggested, to the Solway Junction Railway. One of the 0-4-2Ts is seen here in an official builder's photograph, bearing a plate on the boiler side carrying No. 1, presumably her intended number on the N&BJR.

BELOW: On the CR, this engine became No. 541 and was transferred to the duplicate list in 1892 as No. 541A, as seen here. The engine is still in almost original condition, apart from the addition of a cab roof. It was withdrawn in 1900.



bankrupt and having just managed to extend beyond the crossing of the Watling Street and the River Tove at Towcester, the line petered out in a field near to the village of Braden. Suddenly, the grand optimism of the newly named MC&SWR was replaced by financial turmoil and one of the first effects was that the company was unable to pay for the locomotives ordered from Neilson & Co. of Glasgow for the opening of the line. These were to have comprised five each of that maker's standard 0-4-2 tank and tender locomotives; despite the official photographing of one example as MC&SWR No. 1, none ever reached the line and the order was cancelled with only five locomotives built. One of these was sold overseas and the other four, despite oft repeated accounts of being taken into Solway Junction Railway stock, were actually sold by Neilson directly to the Caledonian Railway company.

The MC&SWR was therefore faced with an immediate locomotive shortage and it is not at all clear how services between Blisworth and Towcester were inaugurated.

One of the earliest locomotives owned by the N&BJR, is stated to have been a 'decrepit antique' known as *The Owl* and this may just possibly have been an ex-Liverpool & Manchester Railway 0-4-2 of

the same name, which is known to have been replaced in late 1853 and then sold in 1855. This could have been one of the batch of up to six such locomotives reputedly purchased by Isaac Watt Boulton. This well known purveyor of second-hand and reconstructed engines is recorded as having dealings with the Northampton & Banbury Junction Railway in their earliest days and Alfred Rosling Bennett describes, in his delightful account entitled *The Chronicle's of Boulton's Sidings*, how one of these was an old Sharp Roberts 2-2-2 tender locomotive. This was collected from Longsight, as L&NWR No. 1125, on 28th February 1866 and driven to Blisworth by Boulton himself, with a stop on the way at Crewe to pay the required sum of £240. After a night at Blisworth, a start was made at 8am for Towcester, only to find the route blocked by wagons, no doubt engaged in the construction of the line which was still just over two months away from opening. Strangely, however, the author then comments that the locomotive had thus started earning revenue for Boulton on hire to the East & West Junction Railway, and not the Northampton & Banbury Junction. The E&WJR, later to become a bedfellow of the Northampton & Banbury within the Stratford upon Avon & Midland Junction Railway empire after the amalgamation of 1910, was not

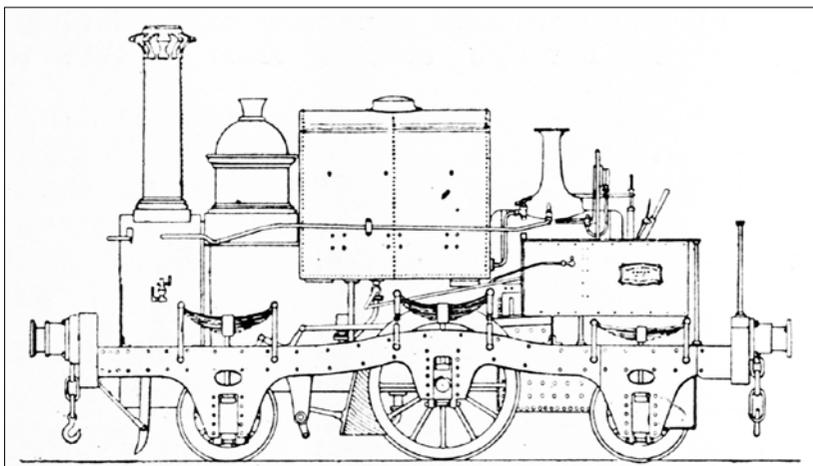


An early view of Towcester station, before the familiar, centrally positioned signalbox, which was sited just beyond the footbridge, replaced the original north and south boxes, the former of which is shown here. The N&BJR reached here from Blisworth in 1866 but it was to be another six years before the line was extended on to Cockley Brake Junction. Presumably, the 1875 auction of the five N&BJR locomotives would have taken place somewhere in the goods sidings situated just behind the right hand platform. Apart from the signals mounted on the footbridge, another item of interest is the old wooden engine shed, seen to the left, behind the platform and through the pillars of the awning, which was by then in use for carriage storage. NEIL PARKHOUSE COLLECTION

opened from Towcester until 1873. However, this apparent slip of the pen is probably of little consequence, as the locomotive in question was quickly found to have a cracked cylinder and was returned to Boulton, who later rebuilt it after his usual fashion, as a smaller wheeled saddle tank.

Somehow the MC&SWR managed to commence operations, probably using other hired locomotives and possibly also making use of those previously operated by the contractors engaged on the construction of the line. One of these, a relatively new Hunslet 0-6-0 saddle tank named *Vulcan*, was to be the unintended star of a celebrated local legal dispute of early 1867. The locomotive was being kept by its then owner, the subcontractor C.N. Foster, in a shed at the end of the line at Bradden. With his contract ended owing to the dire financial situation, Foster took the opportunity to sell the locomotive to a Mr Ashwell for £1,100. However, when Ashwell attempted to obtain the locomotive and remove it to Blisworth, he found it to have been incorrectly seized, along with other property actually owned by the MC&SWR, under a warrant issued by the High Sheriff against the railway company. Order was eventually restored but Foster then found it necessary to pursue the Sheriff for the sum of £50 that he had lost through a reduction of the sale price during the period of the dispute. It is, however, clear that the MC&SWR could not have operated their services

without some outside help, and it has been stated that the L&NWR were approached to provide locomotives and stock from 1st October 1866, although so far nothing has emerged from L&NWR minutes to confirm this. This decision might be assumed to have been just a consequence of the financial state of the MC&SWR and the resultant



Isaac Watt Boulton, of Boulton's Sidings fame, supplied many a small railway with his unique brand of often much rebuilt locomotives, which he obtained from larger railway companies after their main line careers were over. The N&BJR were no exception and, in March 1866, Boulton provided an old L&NWR 'Sharpie' 2-2-2 just before the line was opened. No doubt this assisted in the final stages of construction but it is also very likely that it was also used to help operate the line in those difficult early months, before finding itself returned to Boulton's yard at Ashton-under-Lyne in July. This drawing shows the locomotive after Boulton had rebuilt it as a saddle tank.

paucity of their locomotive stock. However, a more significant factor may have been that when Captain Rich inspected and approved the line prior to its opening, one of his stipulations was that the Blisworth to Towcester passenger trains must be operated by tank locomotives. At the time there was no means of turning engines at Towcester and presumably the Captain was unhappy at the prospect of tender first operation over the newly constructed line. It is quite possible that the MC&SWR did not anticipate this requirement and perhaps having no tank locomotives of their own, were forced to turn to the L&NWR for short term assistance, and this point may also have relevance in later locomotive developments on the line.

The opening in 1866 proved to be the high point of the existence of the MC&SWR and before long the company was in such serious financial difficulties that, by 1869, some parts of the line had actually been sold at auction. However, another Act of Parliament was obtained in July 1870, to raise capital and thereby allow completion of the route from Braden to Cockley Brake, and John Aird & Son were duly appointed as contractors, the line finally being opened throughout on 1st June 1872 with stations at Wappenham and Helmdon. There was also, at this point, a realisation that the line was unlikely to ever attain its ambition of extending further west and so the company title reverted back again to the far more appropriate Northampton & Banbury Junction Railway.

However, to return to the local newspaper auction announcements, the earliest of the series, dated 17th November 1866, is quite clearly a reflection of the fact that the N&BJR had been forced to suspend construction after the opening of the line from Blisworth to Towcester earlier that year. This advertisement details an extensive range of what might be described as 'contractor's hardware', which was to be auctioned 'in various parishes on the N&BJR line between Blisworth and

Helmdon.' Items listed were 358 waggons [*sic*], 300 wheelbarrows, 33,500 feet of rails, sleepers, chairs, keys, girders, a weighbridge, timber, plus a whole plethora of assorted small tools and equipment; in fact almost a full inventory of a suspended railway construction operation. The auction also included, unfortunately without any further details, a 'locomotive steam engine', which was possibly one of the contractors locomotives used on the Blisworth to Towcester stretch, or maybe even one of the early unrecorded N&BJR locomotives. The same auctioneer, W.J. Peirce of Northampton, then advertised a second sale in a newspaper of 22nd December of that year, which appears to have been a clearance of the remaining impedimenta from the first auction, with smaller numbers of wagons and barrows featuring alongside assorted permanent way materials and other oddments; however the locomotive was no longer listed, so must be assumed to have been sold earlier.

The next auction announcement appeared in the *Northampton Mercury* of 22nd October 1870. The objective of this auction, to be held at Towcester station, was the sale of a 'six wheeled, four coupled tank locomotive engine, now in the use of the said company, and distinguishable by the name 'W.A. Michael, owner, London'.' The locomotive was also to be sold 'with, and subject to, an agreement dated 14th September 1869, between Vincent James Barton, Merchant, of the one part, and the Midland Counties and South Wales (now the Northampton and Banbury Junction) Railway Company of the other part.' As will be seen later, this date will be significant in the search for the possible identity of this locomotive.

Walter Amos Michael was listed as a director of the MC&SWR/N&BJR from 1870 until 1891, along with other interests in South America, and it would therefore seem that he had financed the purchase of this locomotive on behalf of the line. However, of more interest is V.J. Barton, who is described as an 'iron merchant and



Another Boulton's Sidings product to appear on the N&BJR was an 1847 Longridge-built tender 0-6-0 named Cotton, late of the L&NWR, which was provided to contractors John Aird & Son at Blisworth around 1870. At this time, construction of the N&BJR had just restarted from a point in a field west of Towcester and was advancing towards a junction with the L&NWR at Cockley Brake. As with the 'Sharpie' six years earlier, Cotton's main function would have been with the contractor but there is every possibility that the locomotive may have been pressed into service to assist on the newly opened section. Boulton had a few of these locomotives, one of which is pictured here in the yard at Ashton, in the company of another of his diverse collection of rebuilt antiques.

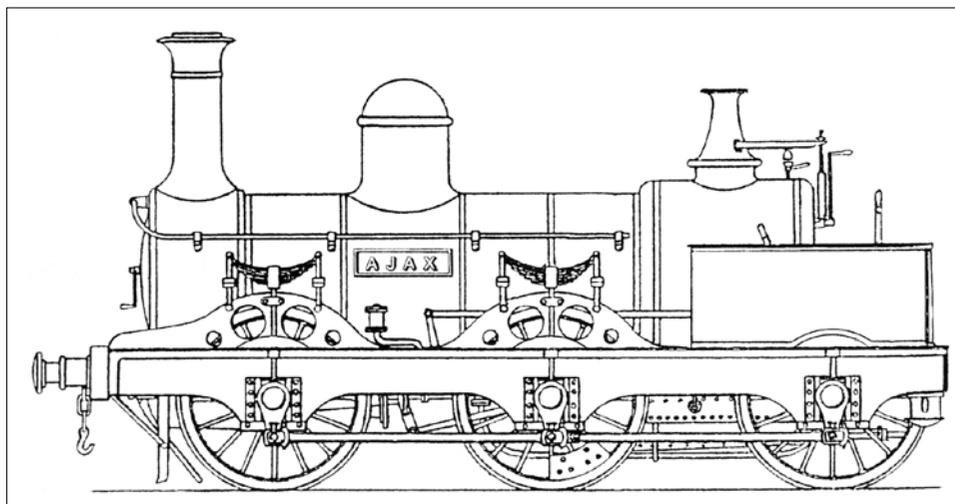
contractor for railway plant', operating from 23 & 28 St. Martin's Lane, Cannon Street, London. Barton had earlier appeared as a partner of James Davis of Ulverston in 1858, then operating as iron and steel manufacturers, engineers, millwrights and founders. In July 1861, a partnership between a John George Barton and Vincent James Barton, Iron Brokers of 75 Old Street London, was dissolved and *The Times* newspaper of 28th February 1900 also mentions a bankruptcy hearing for V.J. Barton, Iron Merchant, of 15 Wallbrook, London. However, there is no trace at all of Barton offering any locomotives for sale in any of the usual trade journals of the period, so it must be assumed that he was not a regular dealer in such things, despite his obvious involvement in railway contracting. It is

therefore tempting to think that Barton had been retained by the MC&SWR to obtain a suitable locomotive in their hour of need, although it is a little difficult to understand just why it should then be made available for sale so soon after its original purchase. It should be noted that by the date of this auction, October 1870, the MC&SWR had obtained their Act of Parliament to refinance the completion of the line through to Cockley Brake and in so doing had also reverted title to the Northampton & Banbury Junction Railway.

However, the locomotive obviously did not attract any buyers, as evidenced by a further auction at Wappenham station, on 18th March 1873. This listed a selection of 'surplus materials, not required in the construction of the above line of railway', including 40 tons of rails, 20 tons of fishplates, 19 tons of fang bolts and 5 tons of screws. Also featured were not one but two 'six wheeled, four coupled, locomotive tank engines, with copper fireboxes, and brass tubes.' Quite obviously, the materials were the residue from construction of the line through to Cockley Brake, although the choice of Wappenham station for the auction appears somewhat strange, as the accommodation there was relatively limited compared with Towcester or Blisworth. However, the six-wheeled, four-coupled tank locomotive from the 1870 auction has apparently now been joined by another of the same general description.

Once again, it appears that the auctioneer was unsuccessful in selling the locomotives.

The *Northampton Mercury* of 24th July 1875 then notified a forthcoming auction on 23rd August, again at Towcester station. Various effects are described as 'lately in use for working the Northampton & Banbury Junction Railway, but in consequence of other arrangements having been made, they are no longer required for that purpose.' This refers to the decision taken by the N&BJR during that year, to request the London & North Western Railway to provide locomotives and rolling stock for the line. This was minuted by the L&NWR on 12th March 1875, with a reference date of February 19th, although the arrangement would not be fully ratified by the Railway Commissioners until 26th October 1876. The L&NWR agreed to provide locomotives and crews at one shilling per train mile, to include provision of a driver and fireman. The footplate staff were to be considered as pro-tem servants of the N&BJR, with the



In May 1872, the N&BJR purchased ex-South Staffordshire Railway No. 21 *Ajax* from the L&NWR for £700. This was a Vulcan Foundry 0-6-0 tender engine of 1855, which had originally been intended for the Shrewsbury & Hereford Railway, before instead being diverted to the SSR. Later, it became in turn L&NWR No's 306 and 906, and then 1227 and 1827 on the duplicate list, before joining the N&BJR as their No. 4.

L&NWR being absolved of all liabilities. Payment was to be made fortnightly and the arrangement was approved by the L&NWR Locomotive Committee on the understanding that trains could be hauled by one locomotive. A subsequent minute confirmed that the L&NWR commenced provision of locomotives from 1st March 1875 and took over the N&BJR footplate staff. The other items listed in the auction are mainly of an engineering nature, and include an iron water tank, lathes, blacksmith's equipment, engine lamps and tools, all stated as having been connected with the engine shed. However, by far the most significant items were five locomotive engines and four passenger carriages, being described as follows:

A LOCOMOTIVE TANK ENGINE, NO. 1, SIX WHEELS, FOUR COUPLED 15-IN. CYLINDERS,

A LOCOMOTIVE TANK ENGINE, NO. 2, SIX WHEELS, FOUR COUPLED 15½-IN. CYLINDERS,

A LOCOMOTIVE TANK ENGINE, NO. 3, SIX WHEELS, FOUR COUPLED 16-IN. CYLINDERS,

A LOCOMOTIVE ENGINE, NO. 4, SIX WHEELS, ALL COUPLED, 17-IN. CYLINDERS, ALSO TENDER TO SAME,

A LOCOMOTIVE ENGINE, NO. 5, SIX WHEELS, ALL COUPLED, 18-IN. CYLINDERS, ALSO TENDER TO SAME

THE ABOVE ENGINES, NOS. 1, 4, AND 5 HAVE LATELY UNDERGONE THOROUGH REPAIRS

FOUR PASSENGER CARRIAGES

The early locomotive history of the N&BJR is not particularly well documented but there is general agreement in published sources that the line owned three locomotives in this period of the mid 1870s, all being purchased from the L&NWR during 1872 and 1873. However, it should perhaps be stated that the existence of the two additional locomotives listed above is not totally unrecorded, at least statistically. In his treatise on the locomotives of the Severn & Wye Railway, in the *Railway Observer* of 1954, 'Dean Forester' notes that a Board of Trade return records that the N&BJR owned five locomotives on 31st December 1874. That author's interest in the N&BJR was due to the fact that one of these locomotives, a Hawthorn 0-6-0, was subsequently sold to the S&WR, where it was

later to be named *Ranger*. This sale was confirmed by the subsequent return for 1875, which showed the N&BJR stock as having been reduced to four engines. In addition, Harry Parr, in his 1963 history of the Severn & Wye, comments that a N&BJR account of 1875 shows 'the balance of hire and purchase of engine No. 5 including repair £956 18s 11d, less realised by sale of same £800' and this also confirms the sale of the Hawthorn.

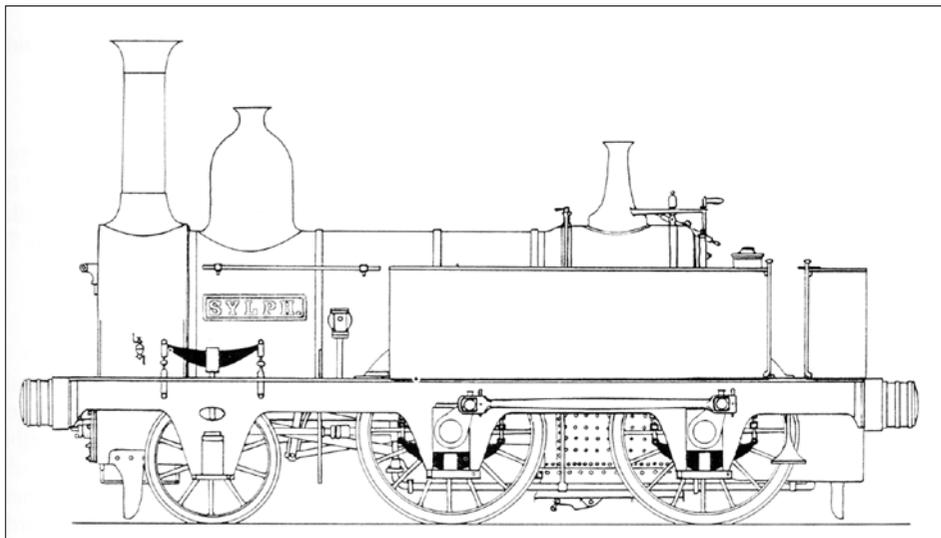
The above information on the S&WR purchase of N&BJR No. 5 also suggests that the numbers used to identify the five locomotives in the 1875 auctioneers details are, in actual fact, their running numbers on the line and not just a convenient means of listing them for the sale.

The first of these to arrive on the N&BJR, in May 1872, was an 0-6-0 tender locomotive, designed and built by Charles Tayleur at his Vulcan Foundry in 1855. This had originally been No. 21 *Ajax* of the South Staffordshire Railway but had then subsequently seen service with the L&NWR, before being sold to the N&BJR for £700. This was minuted as such by the L&NWR Locomotive Committee on 14th June 1872. This engine is recorded as having 17ins by 24ins cylinders and thus would appear to be No. 4 in the above auction list.

Next was another 0-6-0 tender locomotive, a Hawthorn long boiler type of 1849, originally L&NWR No. 239, which became No. 1849 by the time of its purchase by the N&BJR for £1,000 as minuted in February 1873. This was possessed of 18ins by 24ins cylinders and so would appear to be No. 5 in the above list, and the engine subsequently sold to the S&WR.

Finally, as confirmed in L&NWR minutes of April 1873, the N&BJR purchased another South Staffordshire locomotive, this time a Sharp Brothers 2-4-0 tank engine of 1851, this being one of the earliest of the side tank type to appear in this country. The six-wheeled, four-coupled arrangement and 16ins by 22ins cylinders of SSR No. 14 *Sylph*, confirm this as engine No. 3 in the auction list.

This therefore leaves two further unidentified locomotives, No's 1 and 2, both being 'six wheeled, four coupled tank engines', with 15ins and 15½ins cylinders, and it appears highly likely that these are the same two locomotives that featured in the auction of March 1873, and that one of them had also been for sale as long ago as 1870.



The N&BJR's third purchase from the L&NWR was this ex-SSR Sharp, Stewart 2-4-0T of 1851, which had become L&NWR No. 1831 by the time of its sale in April 1871. The four coupled tank configuration and 16 inch cylinders quoted in the auction announcement of August 1875 confirm this as N&BJR No. 3.

Any lingering doubt that at least one of these two locomotives was previously featured in 1870 would then seem to be removed by the appearance of one further auction announcement in late November 1877. There was to be but one item in the auction, to be held on 14th December, and this was again a 'valuable locomotive tank engine ... six wheels, trailing and driving coupled.' Fortunately, however, on this occasion, the locomotive is much more fully described, as follows:

A VALUABLE LOCOMOTIVE TANK ENGINE BUILT BY SHARP, STEWART, AND CO., AND RE-BUILT BY THE LONDON AND NORTH-WESTERN RAILWAY COMPANY IN 1872. SIX WHEELS, TRAILING AND DRIVING COUPLED, 5FT. 4IN. DIAMETER; LEADING DITTO 3FT. 8IN. DIAMETER; COPPER FIRE-BOX AND BRASS TUBES; CAPACITY OF TANK (SIDE), ABOUT 1,000 GALLONS; 15-INCH CYLINDERS (OUTSIDE), 22-INCH STROKE.

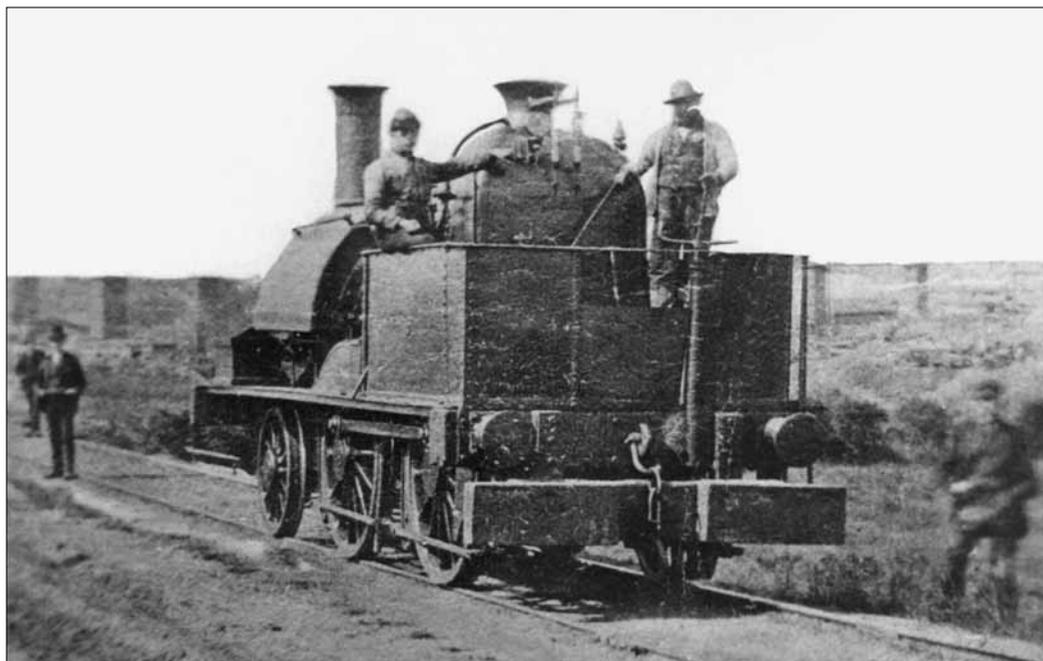
THE ENGINE MAY BE SEEN ANY DAY PREVIOUS TO THE SALE, ON APPLICATION TO MR. PORTER, TRAFFIC SUPERINTENDENT, N. AND B.J. RAILWAY, BLISWORTH STATION. PARTICULARS MAY ALSO BE OBTAINED OF MR. VINCENT J. BARTON, ST. CLEMENT'S-LANE, LONDON.

This further mention of V.J Barton is probably sufficient confirmation that this locomotive, still present on the N&BJR in 1877, is the same engine that was first offered for sale in 1870.

Having thus accounted for the identities of the three 'known' locomotives, this leaves two unknown tank engines but given the unexpectedly detailed description of one of them, it was felt that, with more investigation, there might be a possibility of a more definite identification. Therefore, rather more in hope than expectation, the search began. It was thought that Sharp works lists would reveal some likely candidates and that the knowledge of the 1872 rebuild by the L&NWR might also assist with the identification. However, examination of the available lists of the products of Sharp, Roberts and Sharp, Stewart provided nothing that closely resembled the description given. The North London Railway's Sharp Stewart 2-4-0Ts of 1855 were dimensionally similar but these were well tanks and also had inside cylinders, and little else in the works lists

came close to the required configuration. Baxter's *Locomotive Catalogue* also provided few clues and nothing in the L&NWR lists seemed to match with the stated rebuilding of a suitable Sharp product. The L&NWR did rebuild many of their tender engines into 2-4-0 tanks but these were Crewe products and also did not fit the required dimensions. The possibility had to be considered of a major rebuild having completely altered the configuration and dimensions of the original locomotive. This, however, was thought to be rather unlikely considering the financial state of the N&BJR and it was perhaps more likely that the L&NWR merely overhauled the locomotive at the request of the smaller company. This is, in fact, alluded to in the 1875 auction details, where engines No's 1, 4 and 5 are stated as 'recently having

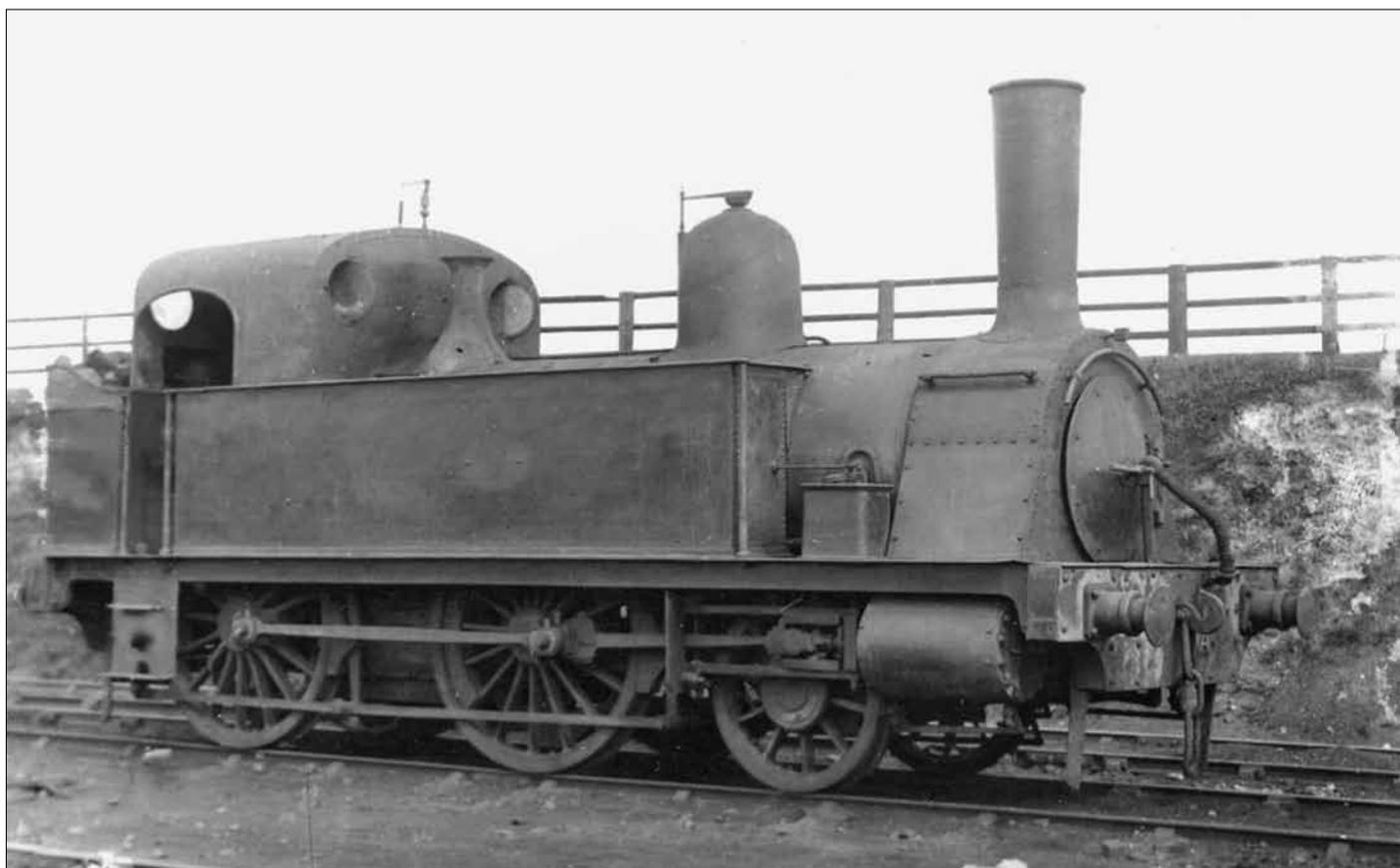
North London Railway No. 27 was purchased by V.J. Barton for £700 in October 1868 and probably became N&BJR No. 2. This was an early Robert Stephenson tender 2-4-0, originally owned by the Northumberland & Durham Coal Company and used at their Thameside wharves to move imported coal to merchants based alongside the nearby NLR lines. The NLR took over the locomotive when this traffic was discontinued around 1858 and subsequently rebuilt it at Bow Works as a 2-4-0ST. Although no photographs of this locomotive seem to have survived, the above illustration does show a similarly converted Stephenson 2-4-0, which originated with the Chester & Birkenhead Railway, and later passed to the L&NWR as their No. 343 *Etna*. After conversion to a saddle tank, it was then sold to Pinnex Colliery, Burslem, where this admittedly rather poor photograph nevertheless probably conveys a fair representation of NBJR No.2.



received thorough repairs'. In an attempt to solve the conundrum, assistance was sought from the membership of the L&NWR Society and although Harry Jack, and also Robin Waywell, offered much help and some suggestions, a straightforward identification still proved elusive, with the result that some doubts were now being cast towards the accuracy of the auctioneer's description of the locomotive. However, one result of these contacts was information from the minutes of the L&NWR Locomotive Committee meetings of 1872. The minutes dated 10th May 1872 stated that the L&NWR then had a locomotive under repair for the N&BJR at Wolverton and two months later, minutes of 12th July reveal that a further two locomotives were being attended to on behalf of that company. A rather cryptic comment is attached to the latter minute, stating that an L&NWR representative had '*told the secretary of that company [the N&BJR] that he cannot undertake any more repairs for them.*' Those same minutes also show that the L&NWR had loaned two locomotives to the N&BJR for four days, presumably whilst the two at Wolverton were being attended to. The chronology of these events suggests that the single locomotive under repair in May could well have been the Tayleur 0-6-0, which is recorded as purchased by the N&BJR in June, and it was probably being fettled up before delivery. This would then suggest the two locomotives in July as being the two '*six wheeled, four coupled tank engines,*' and one possibility is that these were so far gone that the L&NWR had to inform their smaller neighbour that further treatment was impossible. The alternative interpretation of the L&NWR comment is that they were no longer willing to carry out work for the N&BJR, possibly due to past payment problems. The two companies do not, however, appear to have fallen out, as shortly afterwards the N&BJR then purchased two locomotives from the L&NWR in quick succession (being the South Staffordshire 2-4-0 tank and the Hawthorn 0-6-0), this presumably then allowing the two life expired tank locomotives to be put aside. Further reference to the L&NWR minutes reveals a sequence of hiring of locomotives to the N&BJR during the period from 1869 to 1871, so it is clear that the smaller company was having difficulty meeting its traffic requirements with its existing motive power. The minutes do, however, provide one further

relevant piece of information. The L&NWR Locomotive Committee reported on 23rd September 1869, that the N&BJR had requested the use of the main line water standard at Blisworth station, as their own water supply was proving insufficient. This was due to the fact that they had recently started working the line with a larger engine than before and the significance of this statement, and its date, will shortly become apparent.

At this point in time, it seemed that further identification of either of the 'mystery' locomotives would prove impossible. However, the various trawlings through locomotive works lists and other sources finally led to the minutes of the North London Railway Company and here a familiar name emerged. According to their minutes of October 1868, the NLR had just sold their locomotive No. 27 to a V.J. Barton. This was a former Northumberland Coal Company 2-4-0 tender engine, which had been released by its owners on termination of their arrangement to work their own trains between their Thames wharves and the nearby NLR coal depots. Furthermore, the locomotive, possibly an old Stephenson product, had been rebuilt as a 2-4-0 saddle tank prior to its sale. Could this be one of the six-wheeled, four-coupled tank locomotives of the N&BJR? The suspicion was strengthened by the fact that the NLR minutes of 27th September 1869, then recorded a further sale to V.J. Barton, this time NLR No. 10, which was by then a 2-4-0 side tank engine, having been rebuilt thus at Bow Works from its original 2-4-0 well tank configuration. The dimensions of this NLR class are stated as being 5ft 3ins driving wheels, with 15ins by 22ins outside cylinders, almost an exact match for the more fully described of the two N&BJR 2-4-0 tanks. The one problem with this theory was that NLR No. 10 was originally constructed by Stothert & Slaughter and not Sharp Stewart. However, the Barton connection, and the date of purchase from the NLR which coincides almost exactly with the date of Barton's supply arrangement with the N&BJR, suggests that these locomotives are in fact one and the same. In addition, at precisely the same point in time, the N&BJR had reported their problems with water at Blisworth, due to recently taking into use a larger locomotive. All of this raises the possibility that the auctioneers details may in fact have been at fault and that, somewhere along the



N&BJR No. 1 was probably a Stothert & Slaughter 2-4-0 well tank locomotive, ten of which were supplied to the North London Railway in 1853-4. Two of the class were subsequently rebuilt with side tanks and sold out of service in September 1869, one being purchased by V.J. Barton, who is referred to in the details of the auction that took place at Blisworth station on 14th December 1877. The other locomotive was sold to the Whitehaven, Cleator & Egremont Railway, where it became their No. 12 *Marron*, eventually passing into the ownership of the Furness Railway. It fortunately survived there long enough to be photographed at Moor Row shed around 1897, so giving us just a glimpse of how N&BJR No. 1 might have appeared.

line, perhaps the initials SS may have been misinterpreted, with the auctioneer then erroneously using Sharp Stewart as a description for the locomotive, instead of Stothert & Slaughter.

This apparent coincidence of facts, dimensions and dates does make it seem very possible that NLR No. 10 was in fact N&BJR No. 1. The identity of the other N&BJR four-coupled tank engine is perhaps more conjectural but the fact that V.J. Barton does not appear to have dabbled in any other locomotive transactions might indeed suggest that this locomotive was his other purchase from the NLR. One further helpful coincidence is that Barton also purchased four carriages from the NLR in September 1869; could these also be the same four that are seen listed for auction by the N&BJR in 1875?

What then of the actual appearance of these two mystery locomotives? It would initially seem unlikely, bearing in mind the early date, that any illustrations could possibly exist. Fortunately, however, it seems that NLR No. 10 was not the only locomotive of its class to be converted to a side tank and then sold. In 1869, the Whitehaven, Cleator & Egremont Railway took delivery of a similarly converted member of the same class, via the workshops of Fletcher, Jennings & Company at nearby Lowca. This locomotive then survived long enough to be taken into the ownership of the Furness Railway as their No. 12 *Marron* and it was duly photographed, albeit with the addition of a typical FR cab and other fittings, on its last legs at Moor Row shed, thus giving a possible glimpse of how N&BJR No. 1 might just have appeared.

Illustration of the other N&BJR tank locomotive is more

difficult but at least there is a line drawing of the 'donor' 2-4-0 tender locomotive, NLR No. 27, before its conversion to a saddle tank. Photographic illustrations have proved far more difficult to come by but a sense of the appearance of such a locomotive might just be obtained from a view of a 2-4-0ST which had started life as a Birkenhead, Lancashire & Cheshire Railway Stephenson 2-4-0 tender engine of 1852. This later became L&NWR No. 343 and then No. 1139 on the duplicate list, before being rebuilt as a saddle tank and sold to a colliery in Burslem. This admittedly rather poor photograph could bear some resemblance to a saddle tank version of the NLR locomotive and is probably as close as it will prove possible to get to the appearance of N&BJR No. 2.

It must be accepted that much of the above is, of necessity, somewhat conjectural and does rely on some coincidences of facts, dates and circumstances to arrive at a plausible identification of these two hitherto unrecorded locomotives of the Northampton & Banbury Junction Railway. The reality of the situation may of course be somewhat different but at least it is now possible to place on record the confirmed existence and some basic details of these two rather shadowy inhabitants of a little recorded backwater of our railway system.

My thanks are due to Matthew Cadbury, Harry Jack and Robin Waywell, who have all offered advice and suggestions during my research, and also to the Cumbrian Railways Association and North London Railway Historical Society for their help with details of specific locomotives.