

THE EVOLUTION OF TRAIN SERVICES ON THE MET AND GC LINE

by Eric Stuart

(Readers may find reference to the Four-Tracking article
in the July 2018 issue of *Underground News* helpful)

After the Great Central (GC) arrived at Quainton Road and the service south thereof became established, both the GC and the Metropolitan Railway (Met.) provided services. However, the personalities at the heads of the two companies did not enjoy the best of relationships. Matters came to a head when a GC train crashed when failing to reduce speed over the (then) reverse curve into Aylesbury station in 1904. About that time, both the leaders retired and a period of better relations between the companies began.

On 2 April 1906, the Metropolitan & Great Central Joint Railway (MGCJR) was created. This latter took over the lines of the Metropolitan Railway north and west of Harrow South Junction, with the exception of the branch to Uxbridge. These included the main line between Harrow-on-the-Hill and Verney Junction and the branch from Chalfont & Latimer to Chesham. The MGCJR was created under the terms of the Metropolitan & Great Central Railway Act, which received Royal Assent on 4 August 1905. At the same time, the Great Central and Great Western Joint Railway was formed, covering the lines south of Aylesbury via Princes Risborough to Northolt Junction. This was the result of a new line that aided the GC by partly avoiding congestion on the Met. and also giving the Great Western a shorter route to Birmingham¹. One curiosity was that a Joint Committee was set up to manage a new Aylesbury station, jointly owned by two joint railways!

Some points on terminology: The new line was commonly called just 'The Joint Line' and, even in later LT days, some staff still belonged to a particular class that made them feel superior to others². The line north of Baker Street was called 'The Extension' and trains to and from there were called 'Extensions' and may still be!

The weekday service was approximately hourly to and from Aylesbury, a few more to/from Chesham (which was also served by connections with Aylesbury line trains at Chalfont Road) and about two-hourly on to Verney Junction. But no kind of 'clock-face' intervals pertained. It may be a surprise, as the line to Verney Junction is usually considered a Metropolitan one, that services on it were divided between Met. and GC trains: some were GC and later LNER shuttles to and from Aylesbury and some nominally GC ones were worked by the Met. There was hardly a peak service in those days that far from London, although there were a number of suitable trains for those who wished to travel at those times. There were no trains for 'artisans', such as from the inner suburbs. Only much later did longer-distance commuting become the common thing it is today, although the introduction of the Pullman Cars 'Galatea' and 'Mayflower' in 1910 was a boost (see below).

The earliest trains of old Metropolitan four- and eight-wheelers gave place to the Ashbury and later Dreadnought stock, with the GC offering comfortable trains as well. The 1920s saw little in the way of an improved timetable, as the area was very much 'out in the sticks'. On the contrary, Sunday services ceased between Quainton Road and Brill/Verney Junction on 25 April 1920, although a service to Verney Junction was restored on 2 July 1922. In 1936, Waddesdon (Manor) and the whole of the line to Verney Junction line lost its passenger service, although Quainton Road remained open, with a sparse LNER/BR service, until 1963. Verney Junction station remained open for a little longer for trains on the so-called 'Varsity Line' (Oxford – Cambridge) and the branch line to Banbury with last trains on 30 December 1967³.

Although not a part of the main Joint Line services, mention should be made in passing of the Brill tramway. This anachronistic line lasted until 1935, reaching a frequency of four trains a day each

¹ Previously, the GWR had accessed Aylesbury via the Maidenhead – Bourne End – High Wycombe route.

² I recall one Relief Station Manager telling me how a clerk had tried to send him to cover a shift at some outlandish place such as Hammersmith! "I can't go there, he responded, I'm a Joint Man". I think he spent the evening at Pinner instead!

³ Whilst the Varsity Line is expected to re-open as the East-West rail Link, Verney Junction is unlikely to re-open. There are only about a dozen dwellings nearby and there are no longer lines for it to be a junction!

way and even two on Sundays for a time. Its great contribution to us today is probably that it was the reason to keep an A Class Met. loco operating until it could be preserved.

Just before the last War, the Joint Line service had settled down much as stated in my article on the Four-Tracking. As this was still considered a main line, the LNER ran a number of corridor train from the Midlands and the north, some with refreshment facilities, either running non-stop between Aylesbury and Marylebone or just stopping at Harrow-on-the-Hill. These included named trains such as the MASTER CUTLER and SOUTH YORKSHIREMAN⁴. But the main stopping service consisted of LNER and LT trains. The LNER ones were mainly formed of comfortable Gresley outer suburban coaches including lavatories, some specially built for the line. Some trains served Chesham, some only ran south of Aylesbury, whilst some served stations as far north as Woodford Halse. London Transport trains were made up of the Dreadnought coaches. At times, a train started at Great Missenden or Wendover. First class accommodation was normally available on all trains. The 'sparkle' on the Joint line was the Metropolitan Railway Pullman service offered from 1 June 1910 until 7 October 1939. The trains with Pullman cars varied over the years but tended to comprise a couple of morning trains to London at what we may term 'gentlemen's hours' – i.e., arriving at a time when most ordinary folk would have been at their desks for a while! In the evening, services were more intense: they offered the same gentlemen a ride home from the office; but the cars returned to London for trains out into the country after evenings out, including one northbound at about midnight. Breakfast would be served in the morning and drinks and supper on the evening runs back.

1925 saw the opening of the Watford branch, with a short-lived joint service.⁵

In September 1939, the Pullmans were withdrawn⁶, never to re-appear and, on 6 October 1941, all First Class accommodation on the local trains on the Joint Line was down-graded.

At the other end of the spectrum, as it were, a feature of these passenger services was that they conveyed commodities as fruit and vegetables (including locally-grown strawberries and watercress), milk, as well as mail and newspapers⁷. Extra vans were included in some trains for these items. Many trains had timetabled waits at Aylesbury and Harrow included: there was a parcels and mail office at the latter, where items included the arrival of fish from Grimsby⁸.

I worked for a time with a man who was reputedly the last Metropolitan Railway employee still working for LT. He had been given a summer job on the Met. at Great Missenden, loading strawberries. After two summers, he was offered full time employment and he retired as a train driver. He was one of those men who always had a 'roll-up' in his mouth, wobbling on his lower lip as he spoke: one of a number of Met. 'characters'! An exploit of his was to break the mercury tubes when driving his Met. train into the southbound Bakerloo Line platform at Finchley Road! I don't know why he was on the southbound Bakerloo that day – possibly an early morning Met. working.

During the war, reduced services were operated, although generally to the pre-war pattern. However, although there were some through trains, there had been a Chesham Shuttle for some time. The locomotive 'ran round' the two or three coaches at both termini. At Chalfont & Latimer, the loco had to push the train out of the station before running round. (I have not heard of the coaches returning to the platform by gravity, as happened elsewhere in the UK). But, in 1941, the Dreadnought vehicles were replaced by six Ashbury coaches, formed into two three-car Push-Pull sets, which remained a notable feature of the line for 20 years.

After the war and the nationalisation of the railways, the Joint Line came to be served by the Eastern Region and LT and little changed. However, after a change of policy, the BR Met. & GC local trains were operated by the London Midland Region. By the time I knew them, their coaches were very much past their prime! Whereas, before the War, trains had been of varying length, afterwards, the

⁴ Later, the equivalent of Budget Airlines passed this way in the form of the cheap fare STARLIGHT SPECIAL trains to and from Scotland. The West End roller-skating show got its name from them.

⁵ See 'By Met to Watford' (in *Underground News* No.658) and Brian Hardy's subsequent notes.

⁶ Even in fairly recent days, the through Chesham peak-hour trains were called 'Pullmans' by some staff, although the Pullman Cars rarely went there.

⁷ Newspaper carriage on the Met. was officially discontinued from 18 May 1975.

⁸ Remember, the GC was originally the Manchester, Sheffield & Lincolnshire railway, serving North Sea fishing ports.

LNER/BR stopping and Met. loco-hauled trains settled down to a regular six-coach length, with occasional seven-coach Met. trains.

The multiple-unit electrics to Watford/Rickmansworth were six or eight coaches. At least one electric loco-hauled train went to Watford most days and COP, F and C stock could be seen on Watford and, later, Amersham trains with varying frequency over the years.



Above: When electric trains began serving Amersham from September 1960, the service was merely an extension of the Rickmansworth reversers at irregular intervals. Loco-hauled LT trains to Aylesbury continued, as did British Railways LMR trains to Aylesbury and beyond. An eight-car train of T Stock is seen reversing in platform 2 at Amersham before heading back to Rickmansworth to stable.

Photo: LURS Collection

Below: Occasional P and F Stock ventured to Amersham in early electric days. These were the trains that were scheduled to serve local stations when schools finished, rather than compartment stock, which LT deemed more suitable for such work because of skirmishes at Moor Park between kids from two different schools – they survived until the A Stock replaced the T Stock. An eight-car Metadyne P Stock departs platform 3 at Amersham (Left) while an eight-car F Stock has arrived in platform 2 (Right).

Both photos: Fred Ivey



1946 saw the introduction of a couple of new carriages with air-worked doors in T Stock trains, to trial possible new trains for the line. 1948 saw the new station and track layout at Harrow commissioned. 25 June was the date LT took over operation of the Joint Line as far north as Aylesbury South Junction although the LMR took charge of the track from just north of Amersham on 11 September 1961.

One feature that may be forgotten is that the BR stopping trains, like those before them, served some intermediate stations between Harrow and Rickmansworth, especially Northwood. About half-a-dozen of these trains also served country stations north of Aylesbury⁹, including Quanton Road. Even First Class was available on some. A few local trains each way consisted of older corridor coaches, giving such rare luxury opportunities to passengers at stations south of Amersham. For example, the 07.23 from Aylesbury originated at Woodford Halse and only left Northwood Hills and North Harrow passengers without the possibility of using it, although the 07.30 equivalent on Saturday called at those two stations as well. A return corridor train with First Class left Marylebone at 18.12 on Mondays to Fridays. For some reason, this one scandalously missed out Chorley Wood and Chalfont! On Saturday, it left Marylebone at 12.34 and only left out North Harrow and Northwood Hills.



Above: The eight-car T Stock train that included two experimental cars prior the A Stock design being finalised are seen approaching Dollis Hill. The air doors were controlled by an additional guard from a panel on control trailer 6727. Third car back is 17001, behind which is 20000.

Photo: John H. Meredith

Below: A train of T Stock departs from Amersham, with the goods shed being seen in the left background.

Above: A T Stock train approaches Harrow-on-the-Hill on the southbound. To the left are the flyunder roads for the Uxbridge line. Harrow goods yard may be seen on the right and lines of wagons may be seen in the distance. On the right are track panels, most likely in connection with four-tracking work.

Photo: LURS Collection

Below: North of Pinner, a six-car set of T Stock heads north to Amersham. The new north- and southbound 'main lines' are still under construction.

⁹ Some of them travelled via Princes Risborough.

Photo: LURS Collection



Photo: LURS Collection



About 1960, there were still some oddities in the peak service. The BR train at 05.38 from Chesham (the return working of the newspaper train) called all stations to Harrow except Moor Park. This was a unique working as trains between Marylebone and Chesham had reduced over the years: apart from the 05.38, the last BR train to or from Chesham was from Marylebone, at mid-day on Saturdays only, and had been withdrawn in about 1957. The stock of the Saturday train from Marylebone stabled at Chesham over the week-end for the Monday 05.38, whilst, on other mornings, the stock came with the newspaper van. Most BR trains missed out Northwood Hills and North Harrow, but some trains missed out Stoke Mandeville, another missed out Stoke Mandeville and Wendover, a couple missed out Harrow-on-the-Hill and one missed out Pinner, whilst the one already mentioned missed out Chorley Wood and Chalfont. One or two were fast south of Amersham. After four-tracking reached Northwood Hills, for a short period some of the BR trains just served Moor Park Northwood and Harrow south of Rickmansworth.

The LT service pattern was rather more consistent. The first train left Aylesbury at 06.04, giving an arrival at Baker Street at 07.29 and Liverpool Street at 07.44. This train was all stations to Moor Park and then non-stop to Finchley Road, although the off-peak trains called at Harrow and did not serve the City. Between BR and LT, a fairly frequent service was offered through the peak. In the evening peak, there was a similar service of through trains from Liverpool Street and Marylebone. At this time, LT had a stud of guards at Aylesbury for these trains – one for the early trains and two for the last ones back at night. One driver told me of his early days as a guard at Neasden. He would take the last train from home into Neasden at night and wait there for a loco and brake van at 02.30 to take a couple of guards to Wendover (where one train was stabled) and Aylesbury, for early trains to town. There were also two guards at Chesham, for the through trains to and from there, as the Push-Pull shuttles did not have guards¹⁰.

Whilst more frequent in what we would call peak hours, the stations north of Rickmansworth were served at irregular intervals, which could be wide through the off-peak parts of the day. North of Aylesbury, service was even less frequent. However, for the autumn of 1960, electrification to Amersham and Chesham brought the beginnings of considerable change – the greatest since 1925. The LT Aylesbury trains still ran with the electric/steam change at Rickmansworth, but there were now electric trains to Amersham. Some through loco-hauled electric trains went to Chesham in the peaks, whilst the Shuttle was electrified. Stations between Harrow and Moor Park were mainly served by Metropolitan Watford and the odd Rickmansworth trains, plus the BR ones mentioned above.

¹⁰ I once asked one of the ex-Aylesbury guards as to what happened if someone went sick: where were the spares? He laughed: no-one went sick!!



Above: After the London Midland Region had taken over the former Joint Line from the Eastern Region, the mainstay locomotives of the Metropolitan's Aylesbury service north of Rickmansworth were these 2-6-4T locos. An Up train is seen at Great Missenden, showing the water tower at the London end of the Down platform.

Photo: LURS Collection

On Saturdays, there was a reduced peak service, the out-bound peak being about 13.00 until the Five-Day-Week took effect. On Sundays, LT had the Aylesbury service at roughly 45–60 minute intervals, with the odd BR train. A roughly 15-20 minute service operated south of Moor Park, whilst the Aylesbury's only stopped at Harrow between Finchley Road and Moor Park. There were also the Chesham – Wembley Park (Neasden Depot) morning trains, to change the Chesham shuttle units over, running all stations in the northbound direction and fast in the southbound. At one period, there were London – Watford – Rickmansworth and vice versa trains on Sundays, Bank Holiday mornings and other occasions¹¹. North of Aylesbury, Sunday service was about six trains, though not all served the smaller stations and Quainton Road, ironically, had no trains that day.

¹¹ See *Underground News* No.680 for more details.



Left: In connection of the four-tracking and electrification of the Metropolitan Line in 1960-62, a bay platform was provided at Chesham for use by the shuttle when the through trains operated. This was commissioned from 3 July 1960 and came into use from 12 September 1960. When the rush hour through trains to and from Chesham were not operating, the shuttle used the main platform – the T Stock three-car shuttle is seen in the bay platform. The bay platform had a short life, being decommissioned on 29 November 1970.

Photo: LURS Collection



Above: Although rolling stock on the Metropolitan Line had dedicated services on which to operate, there were often type substitutions to meet stock requirements. For example, T Stock made occasional forays to Uxbridge and occasionally in place of the loco and coaches to Chesham. Since 7 October 1946 one end-of-morning-peak-working comprised an electric loco and Dreadnought coaches from Baker Street to Watford, with the loco running round at the latter. On 24 April 1961, a P Stock train was substituted for the loco and coaches and is seen passing a southbound train of T Stock at Croxley.

Photo: LURS Collection

By the winter of 1961, the four-tracking work had reached a stage so as to allow more trains to run as far north as Northwood Hills. A siding was available on the course of the future Local Lines, as the Local and Fast Lines temporarily merged there onto the course of the future Fast Lines. This allowed a number of peak hour trains to reverse north to south at Northwood Hills. This seems to have been a last minute decision as the published timetable had to have amendments to avoid the new reversing trains potentially clashing with previously-existing trains!

On 23 January 1961, the first diesel workings on the Met. and GC took place (apart from the earlier trials on the Chesham Branch¹²). Marylebone Carriage Shed had not been converted into a diesel depot, so the unit came from Bletchley each day via Calvert, Aylesbury and Princes Risborough, starting work on the Wycombe line. The DMU worked the 08.50 Marylebone – Amersham – Aylesbury and 10.57 back, spending the rest of the day back on the Wycombe line. The First Class was temporarily 'declassified'. As the unit was of four cars and peak hour trains were normally six, some overcrowding occurred, except when Bletchley could add a spare two-car Class 108 to supplement it.



Left: In preparation for the operation of eight-car DMUs, British Railways platforms north of Amersham had to be lengthened, such as this at Stoke Mandeville, seen looking north.

Photo: LURS Collection

On 31 July 1961, A Stock took over from T Stock on the Chesham shuttle and they also filtered into the main services.

However, with the opening of the four-tracking between Harrow and Northwood Hills with effect from 12 September, LT passenger trains no longer ran north of Amersham. DMUs took over at least some BR stopping trains, plus the newspaper train to Chesham and the return working departing

Chesham at 05.38 (which remained unique until replaced by a Metropolitan Line train in October 1967).

Many services between Aylesbury and London were now by a DMU shuttle to/from Amersham connecting with LT trains.

The first arrival possible in London by a through train from Aylesbury was now as late as 08.51 and the latest through train back, calling at intermediate stations, was 19.40; although, as the long-distance trains were still operating, there were two later non-stop trains to Aylesbury. With the shuttle connections, the interval between trains was much the same, with a half-hourly fast LT service south of Amersham.

From June 1962, more radical changes took place, with the full operation of the 4-tracking south of Watford South Junction:

- The introduction of clock-face timetables to Amersham, Chesham and Aylesbury.
- BR passenger trains no longer used the Local Lines nor called at stations Northwood to North Harrow inclusive (although the tracks were used by local freight trains).
- BR introduced a full diesel multiple unit service for their local trains, although a few longer-distance trains still ran north of Aylesbury and they were usually steam-hauled. All DMUs now had First Class accommodation.
- The first through train from Aylesbury now arrived at Marylebone at 08.07 and the last back left at 22.14, although two non-stops still called at Aylesbury on their over-night journeys to the north. Other services were by shuttles to/from Amersham, northbound up until midnight.

The basic service now settled down to be one BR train per hour, only stopping at Harrow south of Chorleywood with the service being every 15 minutes in the peaks. Northbound, the off-peak BR train followed a fast Met. train, calling at Harrow, Moor Park and all stations to Amersham. There was a second similar Met. train a half-hour later, but this was not normally accompanied by a BR train. The Watford service was every 15 minutes. Trains ran through to the City only in peak hours,

¹² See "A Routemaster on the Moon?", *Underground News* No.632, pages 388-390.

when there were a few all stations¹³ trains from Amersham. A few Met. trains missed out Harrow and there were some semi-fast Watford trains, non-stop between Finchley Road and North Harrow. The southbound service was a reflection of this. The opening of the bay platform at Chesham allowed an approximately 15 minute service in the peak direction for an hour in the morning and evening, usually with two through trains to/from London and the rest shuttles. This pattern lasted until November 1970, when the bay platform was abolished – the locals had become used to it.

From the 1930s until the 1960s, there had been fairly frequent Green Line coach services between London, Amersham, Chesham and Aylesbury, but these began to fade and the 703 route disappeared quite quickly. Almost certainly, the improved train services were a factor.

A few trains still served the wayside stations north of Aylesbury, including the former Met. & GC ones, but Quainton Road closed in March 1963 and all Sunday service north of Aylesbury ceased the following October. In June 1963, through Sunday trains to/from Aylesbury ceased: all Sunday service was now by shuttle to/from Amersham.

A general decline in rail services descended over Britain and the Underground faced this as well. The concept was that there were too many trains. The off-peak Met. service was reduced by cutting the fast Amersham train that which ran close to the BR one and the BR one now stopped additionally at Moor Park and Rickmansworth, thus retaining an approximately half-hourly fast train. The bay platform at Chesham, opened with such applause about a decade before, was taken out of use from 30th October 1970. The more-frequent peak service would be no more. Stoke Mandeville station was closed on Sundays from 12 March 1967. From 16 March 1975, at times, Great Missenden signal box was 'switched out', meaning no train could leave Amersham or Aylesbury until the one in front had arrived, which could cause delays.

About 1970, LT experienced severe staffing problems and a number of trains were removed from the timetable. However, this was insufficient and the service went into severe decline, with many cancellations daily. Blackboards at stations advised the trains that were 'off the menu' that day: but the cancellations changed from day to day, not helping passengers to plan their trips. Passengers from Northwood, for example, could be given ad hoc advice to head north to Moor Park for a BR train as no southbound local train was expected for some time. Some fast Amersham trains travelled all stations and some even travelled via Watford and the North Curve to cover gaps¹⁴. The odd C Stock trains made forays into the Chilterns to cover missing Extensions. Pessimism was rife.

In the late evening, there was an approximately hour gap from Amersham and Chesham to London from about 22.00 to 23.00, although a stopping train ran at 22.46 southbound from Rickmansworth. A quirk was that the Chesham shuttle, having no connection at Chalfont, ran un-advertised to Rickmansworth. After the next northbound train for Amersham left, it followed the Amersham train empty to Chalfont, where it picked up the Chesham passengers on the northbound main. I never saw the reason for this: presumably lost in the mists of time.

The Saturday service was much like the off-peak Monday-Friday service, but with less peak-hour trains; also these gradually reduced as the five-day week became common. On BR, the extra train at about 12.40 to Aylesbury was the obvious casualty. The last through BR train had been at about 22.10 for many years, but a later one, at 23.51, ran on Saturday nights until that was withdrawn.

As for Sunday services, 16 June 1963 saw the last through services between Marylebone (and therefore the last from London) and Aylesbury for 25 years, apart from a few that ran via Princes Risborough. The pattern was for one fast and one slow Amersham train, the former connecting with a shuttle for Aylesbury. Amazingly, the Amersham – Aylesbury shuttle was subsequently reduced, with two two-hour crew 'meal breaks', one about noon and another in the evening, giving unaware passengers a nasty shock. All Aylesbury Sunday services were then by shuttle to and from Amersham, although the advertised connections could involve a wait of seven minutes. There was even a proposal to close the Chesham branch on Sundays, but it escaped, only to have the service

¹³ For clarity, after the Bakerloo took over the Stanmore branch, 'All Stations' for a Met. train excluded Neasden to West Hampstead inclusive; although some early and late Met. trains called at some or all of those stations; also at times of disruption. 'Semi Fast' meant non-stop north of Finchley Road, although the first stop north thereof varied over the years. 'Fast' trains ran non-stop Moor Park – Harrow – Finchley Road, except at various periods over the years when peak trains missed Harrow out.

¹⁴ Information about these can be found in *Underground News* No.680.

reduced to hourly and only connecting with the fast Amersham train, not the slow one. This must have saved little, as the crew just sat around for the time when they could have made the second trip. The two-Chesham-shuttles-an-hour service was restored from 20 July 1975.

A personal anecdote of these times:

I was a guard on the Met. back then. One Sunday evening, we left Baker Street with a full train, bound for Amersham to connect for Aylesbury. However, there were track works at Neasden, so, arrived at the Bakerloo platform at Neasden, we had to detrain all the passengers, trundle down 'Klondyke' in the Depot, through the 'dip' (flyunder) and pick up the passengers again on platform 2 at Wembley Park, they having arrived there by Bakerloo train. Quite why this palaver was necessary, I don't know. A few weeks previously, we had carried trainloads of passengers by the same route, with the points scotched and clipped. At platform 2, the signal was clear, but the passengers were nowhere to be seen! We waited and waited ... I realised that, if we went, passengers for Amersham would have over half an hour to wait and those for Aylesbury two hours(!), as they would miss the last shuttle before one of the gaps. I determined to wait. A quarter of an hour passed and I fully expected bells to start ringing or a 'big hat' to appear. I was just contemplating an alternative stratagem, when I heard the Bakerloo train approach. A 1938 Stock decanted a full load on to our train, the passengers obviously fearing for their connection (some even thanked me for waiting!) and off we went. Thankfully the shuttle was waiting for them at Amersham. No-one ever asked me about the 15+ minute late departure from Wembley ... Sadly typical of the Underground back then.



Above: *The North Curve between Rickmansworth and Croxley has been used spasmodically by passenger trains from its opening in November 1925 but regularly by empty stock moves. London Transport withdrew the Rickmansworth shuttle at the end of 1933 but a limited service of through trains was introduced from 16 October 1941, on weekday evenings and Sundays. The service on weekday evenings was gradually reduced and ended altogether from April 1946, but the Sunday service continued through until the end of 1959. In current times there are just three passenger workings via the North Curve at the extremes of the day, none of which appear to be of much benefit to passengers.*

Opposite: (Top) Two southbound train approach Chalfont & Latimer before the A Stock was converted to OPO, that on the left being a train for Baker Street and on the right the Chesham shuttle. The traditional 'shuttle' ended in December 2010 in favour of through trains daily.



Both photos: Brian Hardy

All this was symptomatic of a philosophy we can hardly credit today: service reductions, the expected closure of stations and signalling for fewer trains. Stations like Edgware Road (Bakerloo) and Regent's Park were fitted with special signalling to enforce slow transits through a closed station. The resignalling on the north side of the Circle was for 28 trains per hour (tph) instead of the previous 33. Following this resignalling, the next Met. main line timetable brought morning chaos. Trains were taking up to 20 minutes

from Finchley Road to Baker Street, pausing at each signal. The Divisional General Manager (DGM) wrote a note to train crews, blaming us for the problem. I got a rollicking for writing a response direct to him, pointing out about five signalling problems that I felt aided the delay – probably the main one being that the timetable was pushing 28 tph along the north side of the Circle (actually, 29 in 61 minutes), with no margin for lateness. No-one ever said any of the points I made were correct, but, one by one, I noticed changes were made and the service got back to normality. On another occasion, the DGM complained that trains from the Amersham direction were losing two minutes through the morning rush hour. I pointed out to my SM that this was probably because all the clocks from Amersham to Rickmansworth showed two minutes later than those from Moor Park southward. The SM gave me a filthy look and scuttled away to the telephone. Guess what: next day all the clocks were showing the same time! This period was probably the Underground's *nadir*.



Above: Each year on the Wednesday after the late-Spring Bank Holiday, a fair is held in the streets of Pinner. A southbound train approaches Pinner, passing two 'big wheels' on the right.

Photo: Brian Hardy

An even more radical future was entertained at this time: the Great Central Busway! With the perceived decline in rail travel in the UK, stations like St. Pancras and Marylebone were seen as superfluous. All part of the 'doom and gloom' view of the railway. In Marylebone's case, Wycombe line trains would be diverted to Paddington and Joint Line trains to Baker Street and the City, the Amersham – Aylesbury section possibly being electrified, but otherwise only shuttles to/from Amersham. With a change, travel between Baker Street and Aylesbury was estimated to take about an hour and seven minutes. Marylebone would be converted to a bus terminal and the route out to somewhere near Northolt converted to a busway. Considering the height of many single-deck coaches and the increase in double-deckers, one's mind boggles at the concept of vehicles in two directions passing at speed through the tunnels between Marylebone and Finchley Road! But we know how blinkered politicians can be when a concept is in favour¹⁵ ... Sanity was finally regained and space had to be found for extra platforms at Marylebone, such was the rise in traffic.



¹⁵ Remember the project to divert Crossrail via the north side of the Circle Line to save a new tunnel?

Above: The class 115 DMUs operated the Marylebone – Aylesbury service for some 30 years. Originally in green livery, they were repainted into rail blue livery as applied to suburban BR stock, as seen at Amersham. No.12 'Sarah Siddons' is seen to the left, during early trials of leaf clearing on the Met.

Below: Some rush hour trains to Aylesbury via the Met. were formed of eight cars, one such formation seen on this train departing north from Amersham, comprising five refurbished cars.



Above: A four-car unit of class 115 is seen on the southbound at Chorleywood, incorporating a refurbished trailer in mainly white livery. Note the station name sign which still spells the name as two words. This was officially changed in 1965 but as seen here, the old signs remain. Off-peak DMU services on weekdays was generally hourly.

Below: The Inter City blue and grey livery was applied to suburban stock and the class 115s were included. A DMBSO leads a southbound train into Rickmansworth.



Although the Class 115 diesel trains may be considered a unique feature of the Chiltern services¹⁶, this is not quite true. About six had been stationed at Allerton for work on the new Liverpool Central – Manchester Central hourly expresses — possibly an odd choice of stock. Coincidentally, this meant they were working at the two extreme ends of the Great Central. Latterly, the middle vehicles of the four-car sets at Allerton had been sent elsewhere and the power cars paired with Class 108 driving trailers. These were now sent to Marylebone to enhance the London units and this allowed an improved, generally half-hourly service from about 1980. We called the new two-car sets 'GTs', as they could be quite nippy.



Left: The class 115 trains also operated "The Quaintonian" DMU shuttle between Aylesbury and Quainton Road on occasional Bank Holidays when the Buckinghamshire Railway Centre was open. Returning to Aylesbury, a four-car train passes the very few remains of Waddesdon station (between Quainton Road and Aylesbury), which closed on 4 July 1936.

¹⁶ There was a rumour that they were to a much higher standard than comparable suburban DMUs elsewhere because of the number of BR "Top Brass" who used the line, probably working at the BRB headquarters opposite Marylebone station.

**Photo:
Brian Hardy
Collection**

The additional trains brought a resumption of all day fast trains, not stopping at Harrow, Moor Park and Rickmansworth. Unfortunately, the timetable fiascos of late have also happened in the past.

The arrival of the new units coincided with a shortage of staff on BR, with the result that many trains were cancelled, but (again) one never knew which trains on which day! But gradually the staffing issues were overcome and a much improved BR service began to 'gel'.



Previous Page: (Lower) The stock shortage resulted in a Class 47 and corridor stock working a few trains, but the trains worked varied from day to day, whilst odd units of other DMU classes arrived to aid the situation. One of these workings is seen in southbound platform 2 at Harrow-on-the-Hill.

Photo: Brian Hardy

Reliability of the Class 115s was such that the advertised departure time from Marylebone was often the time the stock struggled out of the depot. It then had to reverse into the platform, meaning another late departure.

Another anecdote:

One evening, I joined what I thought was the late-night train for Aylesbury. At departure time, another train left the station empty. It was then found that passengers for last trains to both the Wycombe line and the Joint line had been put on the same train in error. Why the crew of the empty train did not wonder where all their passengers were, I don't know. In the end, our train was advertised as heading for Aylesbury and then to return via the Wycombe line, delivering all passengers on board. I never heard what happened to those waiting for the train en route to High Wycombe!

After the 1970s had seen a decline in the service, in the second half of the 1980s the tide began to turn in spite of the 'Fares Fair' policy and subsequent turbulence in London's transport.

Network South East and later Chiltern Railways dawned and the financial situation in the UK improved. (The increased traffic congestion on roads in the Home Counties helped the improvement in London's public transport¹⁷).

The May 1987 timetable contained an up-beat statement of improvements.

- The fast Met. Amersham service became half-hourly again.
- There were more through City trains.
- Fast peak hour Amersham trains ceased to call at Harrow-on-the-Hill (although this feature only lasted for 18 months).
- The Watford service became every 15 minutes on Sundays.
- Both Amersham Sunday trains were now fast, although there was still only one BR shuttle an hour to and from Aylesbury.
- Stoke Mandeville re-opened on Sundays from 17 May 1987.

The first weekday through train from Aylesbury now arrived at Marylebone at 07.38. Also, Harrow was now a call of every LT train, such was its importance.

Also in 1987, first one of the 'missing' Sunday Amersham – Aylesbury shuttles then the other was restored.

The following year, the Aylesbury shuttles were extended to/from Marylebone from late Sunday afternoon. In 1994, the Sunday shuttle service became half-hourly, again running through to/from London from mid-afternoon.

An operating feature of the constituent members of the combine in the past was uncoupling and re-coupling of trains in service. (This is frowned on today, with block trains of up to 12 cars operating morning, noon and night on Thameslink!). Train lengths were managed to the traffic offering.

The Met. had done this over the years, with a few or even odd coaches added and subtracted at various places. The Pullman Cars were included in this process. The Met. was the last LU line to have uncoupling, although the periods of uncoupling changed over the years.

Latterly, four-car trains ran roughly between 10.00 and 16.00¹⁸ and until late afternoon on Sundays¹⁹. Four-car trains on Saturdays were also scheduled from 12 December 1977 but didn't start operating until 20 May 1978. However, this was only spasmodically because of events at Wembley and because of the potential confusion, eight-car trains were reinstated from 29 July 1978. Some of the coupling and un-coupling was done at Watford and some in the northbound platform at Rickmansworth²⁰, necessitating passengers who were not 'in the know' being detrained from the rear portion of the train, which was then taken to the sidings (normally the adjacent No.23 road) until the evening²¹. To aid current collection, uncoupling was cancelled in wintery weather.

The BR diesel trains were normally four cars, with two coupled units in peak hours, until the two-car sets arrived, when varying lengths could be found. This is similar nowadays with the Turbos, as there are two-, three- and four-car units.

Leaf-fall caused troubles with both Met. and BR trains. After a few years with SARAH SIDDON'S, battery locos, Pre-1938 Tube Stock and 1938 Tube Stock Ballast Motor cars, and the former T Stock

¹⁷ Many analysts state that the average speed of road transport in London today is little better than the horse-drawn era!

¹⁸ I recall the consternation that occurred one evening peak when our second unit failed to show up and we ran to Aldgate and back with four cars, the driver stopping half-way along the platform! On another occasion, the Controller instructed us to take the train to Neasden Depot rather than do that again.

¹⁹ Four-car trains were good for teaching new drivers to master the Westinghouse brake, although, surprisingly, braking an eight-car train was different from a four-car.

²⁰ Amersham line trains at first uncoupled and recoupled in Amersham sidings, but this was changed to Rickmansworth northbound platform from 21 January 1977.

²¹ On one occasion, as I walked back after uncoupling the front from the rear, I realised the front portion was rolling back and it re-coupled, so I had to uncouple again. I don't think I had made a mistake, so it was one of those mysteries that remain unsolved! One crew were notorious for finding their two units "would not uncouple" in the morning. They were on a 'Split Turn' and that meant they didn't have to book on so early in the afternoon to re-couple! Now, what were their names ... ?

Sleet Loco unit being tried, together with a flat wagon with a very Heath Robinson looking bit of gear on it, the famous RATs²² were introduced.

Some of the BR trains were fitted with sanding gear, after some notorious delays on the line brought the use of banking locos²³. This is now aided by adding a few minutes to train timings north of Rickmansworth in the Leaf-fall season, with trains traveling gingerly ...

In 1990, some faster BR trains were introduced – some not stopping at any LUL stations or stopping only at Harrow south of Amersham. There was even one morning contra-peak express that ran for a time, from Marylebone to Aylesbury in 47 minutes, calling only at Amersham.

The more exotic examples of these were soon to disappear, seemingly replaced by empty stock moves! However, the general level of service improved, with a half-hourly through Aylesbury service up to nearly midnight, although the very last service of the day was still a Met. with a shuttle connection to Aylesbury. Another quirk was a couple of advertised trains around the North Curve, although only on the Inner Rail in the morning. I think one came from Chesham for at time. Also, as time passed, the through Aylesbury Sunday service improved out of all recognition.

On 8 July 1991, BR trains ceased calling at Moor Park (although I believe occasional trains have done so since in emergency). That summer saw the gradual introduction of the new Turbo units, the last 115 units operating on 29 July 1992. For a short while, some Chiltern trains on the Joint Line had refreshment trolleys from London, often with the vendor changing trains at Chorleywood, where she/he could take the trolley through the subway to return on the next train.

On New Years' Day 2003, Chiltern Railways abolished First Class.

From 12 December 2010, the Chesham Shuttle ceased, through trains being operated daily²⁴. This heralded the introduction of S8 Stock, replacing the four-car A Stock, which had served the line since 1961. Despite predictions, they never served Aylesbury, as the electrification never proceeded more than a few hundred yards north of Amersham. This was not only the two reversing sidings but the northbound (Down) line, so an electric train could shunt forward and reverse there if necessary.

Possibly two simple indicators of the changes over the years are the arrival time in London by the first through train from stations Great Missenden to Aylesbury, the last back, and the changes to Sunday services. Earliest through arrivals ex-Aylesbury:

Year(s)	Time	Terminus	Year(s)	Time	Terminus
1960/61	07.29	Baker Street	1988/89	07.39	Marylebone
1962 to 1982	08.08 or 08.07	Marylebone	1993	07.28	Marylebone
1986	07.59	Marylebone	1994	07.25	Marylebone
1987	07.38	Marylebone	2018	06.16	Marylebone

Last through departures:

Until 1961 – Approx. midnight – Baker Street

1961 until about 1990 – 22.10 – Marylebone

After 1990 – between 23.00 and 24.00 – Marylebone

Under Chiltern Railways, the 07.30 approx. first arrival was succeeded by a train arriving at Marylebone at about 06.49 and now one even earlier!²⁵. Likewise, the last though train at 22.10 from Marylebone has been succeeded by the last now at around midnight, which had not been available since 1961. Remember, before the war, this had been a Met. train which conveyed a Pullman Car! There had been a late train about 23.30 on Saturdays for a while at the beginning of the 1970s, but then it disappeared again, to return in 1989, although the timing kept changing. Likewise, the loss of through Aylesbury trains on Sundays reached a depth with the cancellation of

²² Rail Adhesion Trains

²³ For example, "Firework Night on the Met", *Underground News* No.631, July 2014.

²⁴ However, the shuttle had a few 'last breaths' following a disruption caused by a spate of bad weather a week or so later.

²⁵ The Line Manager of the time then ceased travelling with the driver of a Met train and travelled Chiltern!

two of the Aylesbury – Amersham shuttles, as previously mentioned, with their restoration and re-introduction of through trains eventually following.

Below: *It is very rare to see LU trains using the section of electrified track north of Amersham to reverse, but one occasion was a Sarah Siddons rail tour with BR coaches in September 1982, when the loco was required to run round the coaches. The lack of use of the current rails is evident as seen by the arcing as the loco shunts ahead. An A Stock train is seen in one of the reversing sidings in the distance.*

Photo: Brian Hardy



On 14 December 2008, a new station at Aylesbury Vale Parkway opened. This station is just north of Aylesbury on the line to Quainton Road and beyond. It serves some new housing developments and aids those living near the now-closed stations to the north.

Currently, the general service level is half-hourly through trains to/from Chesham and a roughly 50:50 mix of Met. and Chiltern of four trains an hour to/from Amersham, giving an approximately 10 minute service (6 trains per hour) south of Chalfont. Approximately half the Chiltern trains go further, to Aylesbury Vale Parkway. In peak hours, some Chiltern Line trains only stop at Harrow south of Great Missenden or Amersham.

The retrograde aspect is that, outside of Monday to Friday peak hours and mostly in peak hours in the counterflow direction, Met. trains now call at all stations north of Wembley Park, and the service is no faster than steam days! In the evening peak, all trains now call at Wembley Park, whether fast, semi-fast or all-stations²⁶. The service south of Moor Park is vastly more than ever provided (approx. every 7½ minutes off-peak), but I question if it is justified and if pruning will come. The high hopes for the Croxley Rail Link, aka the Metropolitan Line Extension (variously seen shortened to MLE and MLX), have been dashed and the work-site lies dormant yet again ('paused'?).

What of the future? Will the MLX finally be realised? Surely such a sensible and simple plan cannot fail: but politics reigns! The Aylesbury line was once considered as a candidate for a Crossrail

²⁶ This does away with the need to have special timetables when evening events are taking place at Wembley.

branch. I still consider the demographic imbalance between the eastern and western arms of the line is such that this would be a good idea. Crossrail would join the old GC just south of Harrow and take over the service to Aylesbury and Chesham, leaving LUL to look after the Watford branch (hopefully through to the Junction!). Passengers from Rickmansworth and further north could have a through service to the City retained or restored. Whether expanding housing development will encourage the (re-) opening of other stations north of Aylesbury Vale Parkway remains to be seen. With or without the Crossrail line, Chiltern trains can access Aylesbury from London via Princes Risborough and there is the prospect of a (London? –) Aylesbury – Milton Keynes service via Calvert and the re-opened East-West Line, which might cater for such a demand. So far, the only new/replacement station planned is to be at Winslow. There was a Winslow Road station on the Quanton Road – Verney Junction line, some distance from Winslow, but the new station will be on the east-west line nearer the town and the previous Winslow station, served by Oxford and Aylesbury trains. But don't expect the return of the Pullman service!

LOCOMOTIVES

The stopping trains on the Joint Line were mainly hauled over the years by the following classes:

GC/LNER/BR

The Robinson 4-6-2Ts that became LNER A5 were built for the line and the 4-4-2Ts that became LNER C12 were also used, with L1s filtering in after WW2. The LMR latterly used their 2-6-4T classes, mainly the Fairburn variety, with tender locomotives such as the Ivatt class 4MT 2-6-0 in use on the longer distance 'stoppers'.

METROPOLITAN RAILWAY/LT

After the A Class 4-4-0Ts came the E class 0-4-4Ts. The famous H class 4-4-4Ts then became the mainstay, with occasional haulage by the G 0-6-4T and K 2-6-4T types. After 1937, the LNER and then BR took over haulage of the LT trains and, with the transfer away of the old G, H and K classes, the LNER and BR used the same locos as for their trains.

The Es still hovered in the background and took over from time to time, whilst the BR Standard 2-6-0 locos, 76xxx series, could be used toward the end of steam.

I know trains were lighter back at the turn of the 19th century, but I can't help admiring those little A Class – and their crews – manfully climbing the bank from Rickmansworth: OK, on a nice sunny day, perhaps, but also in a thunder storm or a Chiltern blizzard, and with no covered cab in the very early days ... !

The Chesham Push-Pull train was worked mainly by the C12s and then 'Mickey Mouse' 2MT 2-6-2Ts, with occasional visits by N5 & N7 0-6-2Ts.

ACCIDENTS AND INCIDENTS

As to accidents and incidents, I suppose the line has had its fair share. Apart from the leaf-fall problems, there have been a few rear-end collisions of varying seriousness, caused by 'applying the Rule', including the collision in fog near Northwood on 31 December 1945. Then there was a DMU fire near Rickmansworth in March 1981 (q.v.); trees and even a van on the line; a train caught in a snowdrift in 1962 (not for nothing were there snow fences on the Chesham branch!); a derailment caused by a buckled rail near Chorleywood; and the tragedy when a wagon with tamping machine ran away resulted in fatalities near Rickmansworth. Thankfully, a similar event early one morning had hilarious results. A small track trolley ran away down the hill toward Rickmansworth. It ran through the station, followed by the breathless crew. A change in gradient prevented it doing any harm and it rolled back into the station. Then there was the time a driver heard a loud crash as he drove his A Stock through the wash at Neasden. The machine had changed from 'Surface Stock' to 'Tube Stock' mode as the train passed through and the machine was seriously disabled!

A long-time traveller told me of the morning when a hold-up in the tunnels south of Finchley Road led to a train-load of regulars de-training from their T Stock train on to the track and walking along the line, after their promised rescue failed to take place.

I read of one incident concerning an Aylesbury train that ended up in the Outer Rail platform at Liverpool Street ('Wrong signal lowered and accepted' is the official term) about 1950. In double-

quick time, it was sent on to Aldgate; the changeover loco waiting in the spur at Liverpool Street was let out onto the inner rail, reversed and headed after it. Not long after, the errant train appeared and headed north, followed by its previous loco, which shunted into the loco bay, which is where it should have gone in the first place. Quick thinking by all concerned. I wonder if it was covered up with no report! As I've said before, we had a lot of fun on the Met!

A last personal anecdote:

One week-day afternoon, we left Baker Street in a blizzard. After struggling up the bank after Chorleywood (the driver doing what officially he should not by rolling back a few feet to get a run and move a few feet further), we eventually stopped, with steam coming from the resistors. Looking out the back and checking the tail lights(!), I saw another train approaching with a fitter and an Area Manager. We coupled and all 16 cars went on to Amersham. It was the only time I used the green flag to wave the train away, as the door controls and bell would not work after coupling. We arrived an hour late!

A final word from that railway statesman, Gerry Fiennes²⁷: "My father's sudden death had just released the Metropolitan [Railway] from the most persistent, accurate and belligerent critic of its unpunctuality. We were brought up to believe that all trains ran to time before the war – the Kaiser's War". *Plus ça change ...!*

Readers requiring more information on some features of this article can find elaboration in the following issues of *Underground News*:

1906 – Issue 575

1920s – Issue 591

1930s – Issue 491

The Watford branch and the more local service on the main line south. – Issues 658 and 680 of *Underground News*.

I am grateful to the late Tim Fowkes and his wife for the timetables I have inherited from his collection that inspired this article, plus additional comments from Brian Hardy and Basil Hancock.

POSTSCRIPT – A BURN OUT

The event will be remembered thus:

On Monday morning of 2 March 1981, the fourth coach of the 07.10 eight-car DMU from Marylebone to Aylesbury caught fire between Moor Park and Rickmansworth. Three passengers were in the car at the time and operated the emergency stop chain, which stopped the train in the vicinity of the south sidings at Rickmansworth.

The car that caught fire was completely gutted within minutes, and also caused severe damage to trackside cables, affecting signals in the Rickmansworth and Watford areas. The DMU was eventually stabled in No.23 siding at Rickmansworth at 11.17.

Services resumed at about 12.30, although burnt signal cables necessitated Watford Interlocking Machine Room being manned for the rest of the day, as the remote control facilities at Rickmansworth for the Watford area had been lost. The seven undamaged DMU cars were taken away from Rickmansworth on Monday night, while the damaged car was shunted to No.35 road in the south sidings.

It was intended that this car would be moved by diesel locomotive the following afternoon and loco 25.194 and brake van duly arrived at Rickmansworth from Aylesbury at 15.00. The loco and brake van were sent to Watford via the North Curve so that the loco could run round the brake van, but after a signal failure on No.24 road at Watford, the brake van was left there and the loco returned to Rickmansworth on its own.

It was also decided that the burnt out DMU car was not fit to move until some equipment from the sagging underneath was removed, and thus the loco returned to Aylesbury minus its brake van, which was left at Watford.

²⁷ Gerard Francis Gisborne Twisleton-Wykeham-Fiennes OBE, MA.

On Wednesday morning 4 March, another locomotive was sent, and having first picked up the brake van from Watford, it then coupled to the damaged car, and departed north following the 11.34 from Rickmansworth.

Below: (Left) The class 115 DMU power car that caught fire at Rickmansworth on 2 March 1981. Fortunately nobody was hurt and the train was eventually stabled on the 'long' No.23 siding road at Rickmansworth.

Photo: Brian Hardy

Below: (Right) The removal of the fire-damaged DMU power car from Rickmansworth. It is class 25 diesel 25.253, the burnt-out car and a brake van, having just left Rickmansworth South Sidings to head (presumably) to Aylesbury or Bletchley on 4 March 1981.

Photo: Eric Stuart

