

The Tenterden Terrier



Number 4

Summer 1974



Journal of the Tenterden Railway Company Limited
Proprietor of the Kent & East Sussex Railway

The Tenterden Railway Company Limited

(Limited by guarantee and not having a share capital)

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Editorial

With the publication of this issue, the Tenterden Terrier has been given a facelift — art paper, an improved printing process and more photographs. We hope that members will feel that this is an improvement on the old style, although as it is more expensive to produce we must try to recoup the additional cost by selling more copies to the general public. In future the magazine will be published three times yearly — on the first day of March, July and November. It will be supplemented by regular Membership Newsletters which will deal with the smaller news items and other local matters.

This is also the first issue of the magazine under your new Editor, and naturally there will be some changes of emphasis in editorial policy. Your Editor feels that there should be wider membership involvement in the content of the magazine, and articles will be written to stimulate comment and contribution from those who have knowledge of the Kent and East Sussex and also of the other small railways formerly operated by the late Lt-Col H.F. Stephens.

Increased emphasis on the historical side will be matched by attempts to achieve better communications between the members, and in particular between those who wish to take an active part in the running of our railway. On the inside cover we are including as a regular feature the names of the departmental heads of the Tenterden Railway Company. Articles will appear from time to time written by them and also by other persons closely connected with day to day operations. We hope that this will enable many more of you to get to know the people who are already involved in the various aspects of the organisation that interest you most.

The Kent and East Sussex is owned by its members and run almost entirely by their voluntary efforts — we would like many more of you to share in its success.

FRONT COVER

Borough of Tenterden Commemorative Week. "Sutton" awaits departure with the first train of the day — 30th March 1974.

[Photo: Donald Wilson]

Operating Notes

Permanent Way Repairs

Derek Dunlavey and his gang have been busy during the last two months packing the track, which has been settling in since we opened early in the year. This has enabled us to use the heavier locomotives (USA's etc) with safety.

Gordon Laming and his helpers have been levelling and packing the track at the end of the present limit of operation which was, until recently, undulating quite badly.

Gordon, Derek and their respective gangs hope in the months ahead, to lay metal sleepers between bridge 1029 and Wittersham Road Station. This will be confined to the straight sections of track because metal sleepers cannot be used effectively on the curves. These sleepers were originally on the Junction Road — Robertsbridge section and have been stored at Wittersham Road for about two years.

The big problem still facing us is the cost of new timber sleepers which we must have soon to restore the track from the present limit of operation to 1029 bridge. These are now very expensive (£3 each) and unfortunately nearly every sleeper will have to be replaced.

Track Clearance

Mark Yonge and his helpers and the Tunbridge Wells Area Group have been active most of this year in clearing the undergrowth through to Wittersham Road Station. This has been followed up with heavy doses of weedkiller applied to the track.

A chain saw has been purchased and has proved to be a very valuable tool in the rapid clearance of unwanted trees. The resulting logs, once dry, are very useful for locomotive firing.

The Shell oil wagon has proved its worth in the spraying procedure. It has been filled with water and parked in a siding at Wittersham Road enabling spraying to take place with a ready supply of water.

Signals

Nick Blake has now succeeded in obtaining a crossing keepers hut of South Eastern Railway origin from Mulbrook Crossing near Hailsham on the Cuckoo line. At the time of printing this should have been installed at Cranbrook Road Crossing, replacing the temporary garden-type shed which is a little out of character.

Work has also taken place in converting



Track reclamation in progress [Photo: Donald Wilson]

the butterfly economical lock to a proper facing point lock in the loop at Tenterden Station. This will be connected to a temporary two-lever frame until the signal box is fully operational in a few months time.

Meanwhile preparation work has been taking place on the signals. The bracket signal from Epsom Downs has been fully restored and in addition several ex-British Rail lattice-type signals have been purchased.

Locomotives

When regular passenger operations started earlier this year we were only able to use the lighter locomotives and the normal loading was two coaches per train. However, demand was so great that four coach trains were needed every Sunday afternoon until Easter. This meant that two engines were needed, one at the front and one at the rear of each train. The two locomotives used were No.10 (Sutton) and No.17 (Arthur).

At Easter, clearance was given for the use of heavier locomotives. However, Sutton continued to perform very well, hauling three coach trains unassisted on several occasions and giving no mechanical trouble.

No.3 (Bodiam) entered regular service on Easter Monday, following re-tubing. Its bigger cylinders give it more power than Sutton and it has generally taken over from No.10 in regular duties with the latter retained as standby, pending re-tubing.

No.22 (Maunsell) began hauling trains on Easter Sunday. Trouble was experienced with steaming due mainly to poor quality coal. This has proved to be a tricky locomotive to fire, but with experience has become a regular Sunday train, working four coaches unassisted.

No.23 (Austerity) is planned to become the other large locomotive in regular use and has been jacked up to check lubrication and replace axle box oil pads as it has stood unused for some time. Whilst this work was being carried out we were pleased to discover that there has been very little wear on this

engine. The only work that needs to be done is the re-metalling of crossheads and by the time this magazine is in print No.23 should have been repainted in KESR green.

No.17 (Arthur) has had its work load reduced primarily because of its inability to operate economically in hauling two coach sets unassisted. She did, however, venture to Northiam to pick up the two birdcage coaches on 18th May, being the only suitable light locomotive.

No.19 (Norwegian) has had all her 100 small boiler tubes replaced. All the old tubes were removed in a day and a half, no mean feat as they were all welded in at the firebox end. Re-tubing is probably the most undesirable job to be done on steam locomotives and has, as on No.3, been carried out by Adrian Landi. In addition the main steam pipes and blast pipe have been replaced. This locomotive should be in service by mid-summer.

No.11 (Pride of Sussex) has had its boiler removed and sent to the Medway College of Technology at the end of April for repair. Soon only a set of frames will be visible as the wheels will also be removed. When she eventually enters service this 'P' class tank will be fit for many years hard work.

The ex G.W.R. Railcar has performed regularly and reliably. Unfortunately its chief limitation is that of passenger carrying capacity. Much work needs to be done externally and all the panels will be replaced in due course.

1974 Photographic Competition

The Kent & East Sussex Past and Present

The Directors are pleased to announce that a competition will be held this summer for photographs taken of the Kent & East Sussex Railway since reopening day, 3rd February 1974 (category A) and also for hitherto unpublished photographs taken prior to the closure of the line to passenger traffic in January 1954 (category B). Prizes of £5 will be awarded to the winners in each category, with consolation prizes of £2 and £1 respectively for the runners up. The closing date for entries will be 31st October 1974 and the names of the winners and reproductions of the winning entries will appear in the March 1975 issue of *The Tenterden Terrier*. A panel of judges will be selected shortly and their names will appear in the newsletter in due course.

Conditions of entry

The competition is open to all readers of *The Tenterden Terrier* and is not restricted to members of The Tenterden Railway Company. The company reserves the right to reproduce any of the entries submitted in subsequent issues of *The Tenterden Terrier*, provided that acknowledgment is given. The decision of the judges on all matters relating to the competition is final.

Prints only please (preferably black and white) should be submitted to The Competitions Secretary, The Tenterden Railway Company Ltd, P.O. Box No 1, Tenterden, Kent, marked either 'A' or 'B' according to the appropriate category. Entries will not be returned or acknowledged unless specifically requested and stamped addressed envelopes enclosed. All non returnable entries will be placed in the 'Colonel Stephens' museum library. You are requested not to submit colour slides as these are not suitable for this competition.

Category A. Any photograph taken of the Kent & East Sussex Railway on or after reopening on 3rd February 1974. Items must have been taken by the person entering the competition and will be judged on their aesthetical and technical excellence.

Category B. Any unpublished photograph of the Kent & East Sussex Railway including the Headcorn extension taken between opening in 1900 and closure to passenger traffic in 1954. A photograph need not have been taken by the person submitting the entry, but he or she must indicate its source and provide evidence, where necessary, that there will be no infringement of copyright. Please ensure that as far as possible, full background details are given. Entries will be judged on historical importance and aestheticism rather than technical excellence.

Please note the regulations with regard to eligibility:-

Establishment of a 'Colonel Stephens' Museum

The directors of the Tenterden Railway Company have decided that, in principle, a museum dedicated to the memory of the late Lt-Col H.F. Stephens should be established at Tenterden. The objectives of the museum will be to collect for public display relics relating to light railways in general and in particular to those with which Colonel Stephens was intimately connected.

It must be emphasised that this is essentially a long term project, in that the more immediate financial priorities for the Company must be to restore the railway and provide the necessary facilities for its successful and profitable operation. However, the directors feel that the company should attempt to collect items as and when they may come available, and a small amount of money will be set aside for this purpose.

Any member who has in his possession letters, old unpublished photographs, documents, relics etc relating to any of the following railways which he feels he would like to

donate to this cause or is prepared to sell for a small sum, is invited to contact your editor, Philip Shaw, who is acting as liaison officer for this purpose. Progress will be fully documented in subsequent issues of The Tenterden Terrier.

Ashover Light Railway
East Kent Railway
Kent & East Sussex Railway
Rye & Chamber Tramway
Shropshire & Montgomeryshire Railway
Snailbeach District Railways
Weston, Clevedon & Portishead Railway
West Sussex Railway

Colonel Stephens close connections with the Welsh Highland and Festiniog Railways are well known, but in view of the existence of companies specifically concerned with the preservation of these lines, it is felt inappropriate to include them on the list at this stage.



*Lt-Col. H. F. Stephens, M.I.C.E.,
Managing Director
1900-1931*

Problems...and People

From time to time we have published comments on the projected restoration of the line and the problems involved. However, until now the prospect of restoration has been very much in the future and it has seemed frivolous to give too much thought to this in the face of what seemed to be almost insuperable administrative problems.

The 2½ mile section just reopened is only the tip of the iceberg and although it constitutes about 25% of our total mileage the amount of effort expended on its preparation has been minimal, compared with that which is needed to restore the remaining 7½ miles. The reopened section was the last to receive attention under the British Railways administration and was basically sound, if badly overgrown, when we started serious restoration 4 years ago. Even so, hundreds of sleepers and tons of ballast have been replaced and extensive packing and realignment has been carried out by Derek Dunlavy, Gordon Laming and their respective gangs. Norton Brown and his successor, Mark Yonge have banished the undergrowth and weeds that once obscured the right of way. Rick Edmondson got down to Bridge No. 2330 at Rolvenden and completed the project by sheer hard graft, most of the time under unpleasant winter conditions. Superficial tasks such as fencing, drainage, erection of signs, repairs to stations and provision of loco servicing facilities have occupied many other people over this period.

The expenditure on this phase of the project has been enormous, the design, supervision and materials for bridge No. 2330 being in the region of £1,200 and it is little more than a culvert compared with the other bridges needing attention.

So it has taken 4 years and a great deal of effort, albeit rather fragmented effort, to restore our best 2½ miles of track. At this rate of progress the 7½ miles towards our ultimate aim is likely to take 12 years and that is not taking into account the extensive bridge repairs necessary on this section. It should be remembered that the Newmill Channel (No. 2336), Hexden Channel (No. 2347) and Rother (No. 2353) bridges must be totally rebuilt. 12 years is unthinkable and we should aim for completion in 6 years.

The finance, manpower and organisation necessary for our project will need to be of Festiniog proportions and at the moment, of course, we fall far short of that ideal. Nevertheless, even with the limited resources to hand planning for the extension of services is going ahead. Mark Yonge intends to completely clear the section to Wittersham Road by the Autumn and half a mile of steel sleepers already in our possession will be laid in the 95lb. track to the West of the Newmill

Channel. As they become available, timber sleepers will be laid in the 91½lb. track adjoining the reopened section. Bridge No. 2336 will be rebuilt and widened, possibly with Military assistance. We already possess a suitable steel span, bought last year from the former Woolwich Arsenal Railway and still stored in South London. The military assistance is likely to be in the form of design and practical work by the Royal School of Military Engineering at Chatham. A detachment from the School has already carried out test boring in the vicinity of bridge No. 2336.

Ideally we should open to Wittersham Road in 12-18 months time, but if this is to be so we will need powerful assistance in the way of finance and people. Secondhand timber sleepers can cost between £2 and £4 each and there are 2,200 to the mile. When we started restoring the line a good price for sleepers was 35p-50p and our estimates were made on that basis. Although the military involvement will largely eliminate our labour and design costs, the new steelwork and concrete for the bridges will cost well into five figures.

Finance is essential, but then so are people and above all we need leaders and in particular a Project Engineer to co-ordinate bridge rebuilding. This is a prestige position and must surely be one of the most interesting and challenging jobs in railway preservation today. We need an energetic and practical person who can be at the Railway regularly, who has supervisory experience, preferably, but not necessarily, in construction or civil engineering. He will be capable of maintaining liaison with the Army authorities at a fairly high level and co-ordinating their requirements for materials, plant and practical assistance. The Project Engineer will be directly responsible to the Board and will also have responsibility for obtaining tenders and letting contracts for any professional assistance that may be necessary.

We also need someone of similar capabilities to supervise the development of a concrete sleeper factory. In view of the difficulty in obtaining reasonably priced timber sleepers we are examining various designs of simple reinforced concrete sleepers. We need someone experienced in concrete practice to progress the project from the experimental to the production stage, again, this will be a prestigious project and an innovation in railway preservation.

Continued on next page

From our Ticket Collection

Occasion: Official opening of the extension
from Rolvenden to Tenterden Town,
16th March 1903.

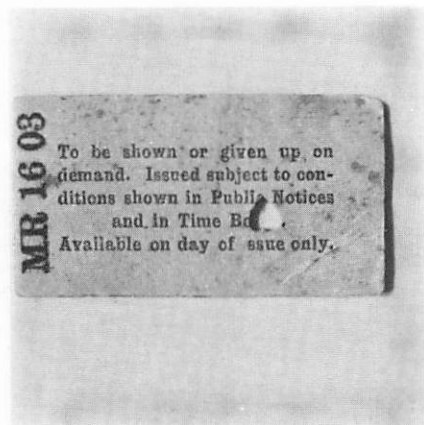
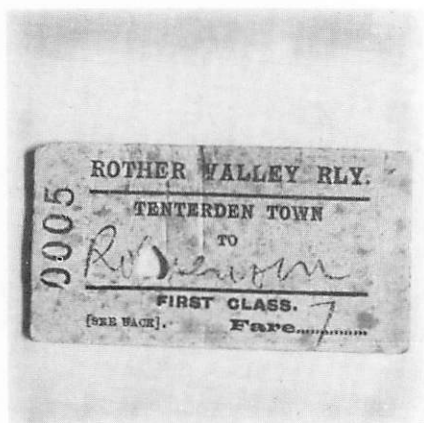
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Type: Edmondson Card

When the Rother Valley Railway was opened to passenger traffic from Robertsbridge to Tenterden on 2nd April 1900, 'Tenterden' station was the Rolvenden station that we know today. It was not until 1903 that the line was extended a further 1½ miles to the present Tenterden Town station.

The bearer of ticket 0005, Mr J Munn-Mace had been involved in previous proposals to build a railway to Tenterden. He was secretary to the South Kent Railway Company Limited, which obtained Parliamentary powers to build a line from Headcorn to Appledore via Tenterden, known as the Tenterden Railway. Owing to lack of finance, the railway in this form was never built, although the Kent and East Sussex Railway ultimately used the same route between Headcorn and Tenterden Town.

Press reports indicate that Mr & Mrs Munn-Mace were also present at the original opening of the line to Rolvenden, in 1900.



Another key position will be that of Building Manager, whose responsibilities are obvious. His first major project will involve placing the contract for the loco shed at Rolvenden, together with supervision of the necessary site clearance and groundwork.

So we need finance, obtainable only if everyone supports the Appeal and we need three determined leaders, who can help push the K. & E.S.R. and themselves, to the forefront of railway preservation.

Both donors and applicants please write now.

Peter Davis.

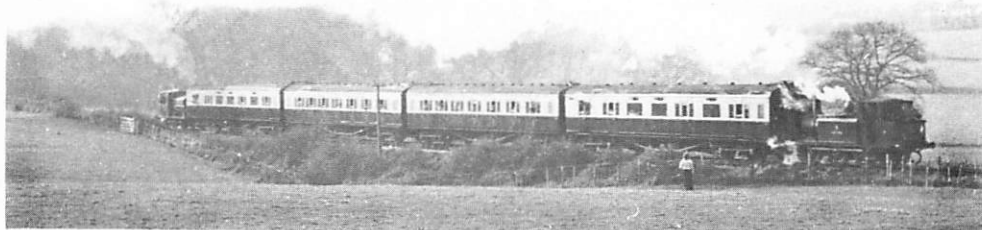
Services are Resumed

[Photos: Donald Wilson]

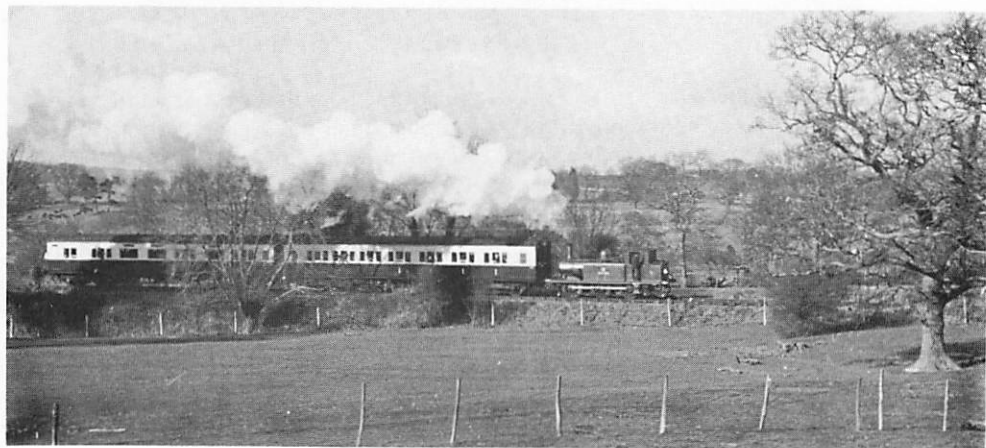
During the early weeks of operation, services on the line were handled by 'Terrier' locomotive 'Sutton' with occasional banking assistance from 'Arthur' for exceptionally heavy loads. Our other 'Terrier', 'Bodiam' was returned to traffic following retubing and boiler repairs on 17th March 1974.



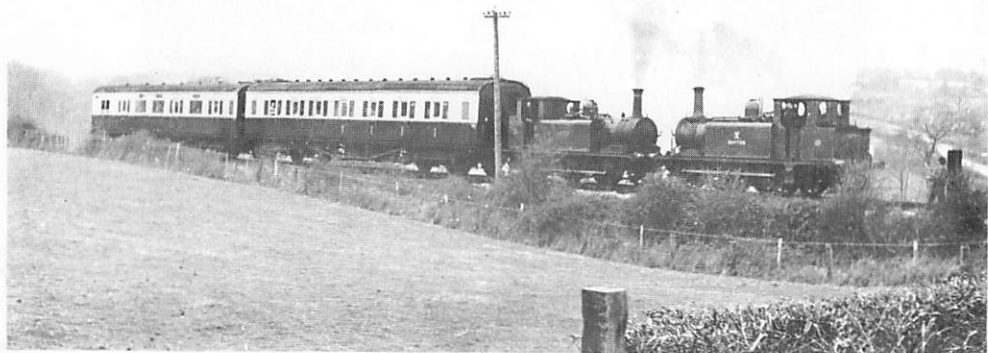
Sunday morning departure from Tenterden



Tenterden Commemorative Week — 'Arthur' assists with the last train of the day, 31st March 1974.



Climbing from Cranbrook Road.



Double-heading on Tenterden bank. 'Bodiam' hauls her first train after overhaul, piloted by 'Sutton'.

The Mystery of Tenterden Town Station



Photo Courtesy George Dobell

The photograph below was taken at Tenterden Town Station on 16th March 1903 during the opening ceremony and by the distinctive silhouette of the tree in the background clearly identifies the photograph above as having been taken in approximately the same position at some time earlier, during the construction of the line. The rather primitive station buildings in both pictures, evidenced by the canopy,

are not the ones that we know today, and it is thought that the original station was moved down to Rolvenden yard at a later date and used as a storage shed until comparatively recent times.

It would be interesting to know if any reader can throw light on the date of construction of the present Tenterden Town Station.

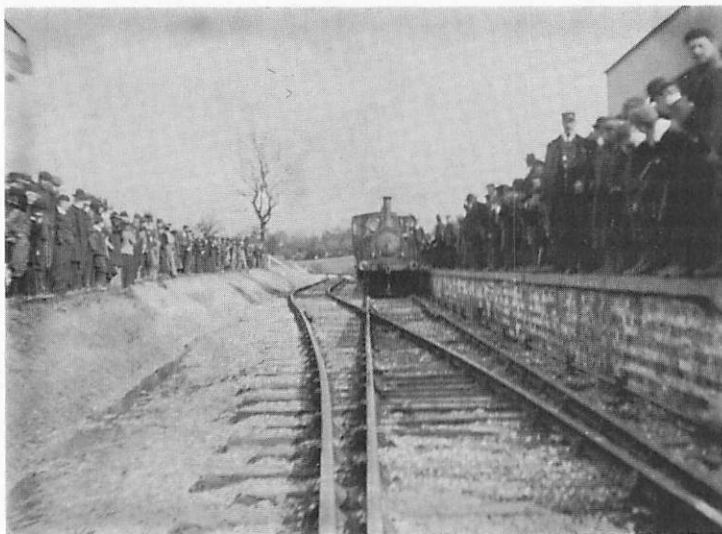


Photo Courtesy Miss Ramsden

Personalities of the Kent & East Sussex

1 : George Dobell

George Dobell, who worked for the Kent & East Sussex Railway for over 35 years, spoke to Mark Yonge recently, and the following is a synopsis of their conversation.

*

M.Y. When did you begin work on the K & E.S.R. George?

G.D. I started in June 1917 at Frittenden Road Station at the age of fifteen. At that time I was under the station master at Biddenden, a man called Charles Palmer. Between trains I used to cycle up to Biddenden Station to sort out the parcels and general freight traffic. There was a lot of business at that station at the time.

At the outbreak of the first world war the line had suddenly become very much busier and Frittenden Road was responsible for the supply of large quantities of wooden props for the Kent coal mines. I also remember handling milk which was carried in 17 gallon churns at that time.

One day in July 1918, the mid-day train from Biddenden pulled in and the guard looked very pale and upset. I shall never forget his face as he said to me 'Charlie's been killed'. Charlie Palmer had been crushed between the buffers during a routine shunting exercise and died almost immediately. He never used a shunting pole.

M.Y. What was your impression of Colonel Stephens?

G.D. Everyone knew when the Colonel was about. A wink from the driver was enough to say that he was on the train. I soon discovered that if you saw him with his bowler hat over his eyes you kept out of the way because he was in a temper. If his hat sat square on the top of his head, then he was in a good mood.

One day the train went through Frittenden to Headcorn with Colonel Stephens on board, and when it returned later that day the guard said, 'here's a shilling for you, the Colonel says your station is very smartly kept'. That was a lot of money to a young lad those days.

I stayed at Frittenden until 1926 and was then promoted to station master at Biddenden. At this time we experienced the General Strike, and Colonel Stephens sent us all a letter thanking us for working normally. He hated trade unions and if anyone of us had dared to join a union he would have had the sack immediately.

By 1930 the line was in severe financial trouble, and we were asked to accept a reduction in wages. I refused and nothing more was said. I realised by this time that the proposed extensions

of the line to Maidstone and Cranbrook would never be built. A few years earlier the Maidstone extension looked certain.

In 1931 I was offered the post of station master at Tenterden and I stayed there until 1954. I remember the war years most clearly. The army practically took over Rolvenden Station and the track and bridges were suddenly improved. We all knew that this was an essential secondary route should the main lines be bombed out, and as a result we were officially sworn to secrecy.

M.Y. Would you say that in one sense the second world war saved the line?

G.D. Yes definitely. We were given a new lease of life, because in 1939 we were in the hands of the receiver and I'm sure the line would have closed 13 or 14 years before its actual date of closure, had not the war started.

M.Y. What happened to you when the line was nationalised?

G.D. In 1947 I was put in charge of High Halden, Tenterden, Rolvenden, Northiam and Wittersham, each of these stations having a porter only. I had this responsibility until the line closed to passengers. From 1954 to 1962 I worked in the goods booking office at Ashford.

M.Y. How do you feel about the line reopening?

G.D. I think it's wonderful, especially as it looked very black for a long time and I thought the scheme would fail. It's a pity I can't get out more but my health won't allow it.

*

The editors would like to thank George Dobell for his detailed memories of the history of the K & E.S.R. and for the loan of his unique collection of photographs and manuscripts. They will be pleased to hear of the whereabouts of any other former employees of the Railway for possible inclusion in this series of articles.

Boxing Day 1973

Early in November, the long-awaited news came that the light railway (transfer) order would take effect from the 19th of that month, and immediately plans were put in hand for the running of our first passenger trains. As the inspection of the line by the D.O.E. could not be arranged until mid-January, these initial trains had to be for company members only, and Boxing Day was chosen as the first occasion on which members could, after many years, travel again on the Kent & East Sussex Railway.

It was soon after 6 am that the alarm clock woke Colin Edwards from his post-Christmas slumbers. He had volunteered to do the vital job of lighting up "Sutton" which was to be the motive power for the day. An hour or so later, the first whiffs of smoke drifted from her chimney into the dampness of the winter dawn, and by 9.30 a willing band of helpers was cleaning the locomotive in readiness for the day's work. With full steam up at 11.15, she nosed out of the yard at Rolvenden and backed up along the platform to top her tanks from the adjacent water column. A short blast on the whistle, the newly-hung gates across the A28 were swung open and with a further "toot" at Orpin's crossing to the consternation of a flock of sheep in a nearby field, 'Sutton' set off up the bank.

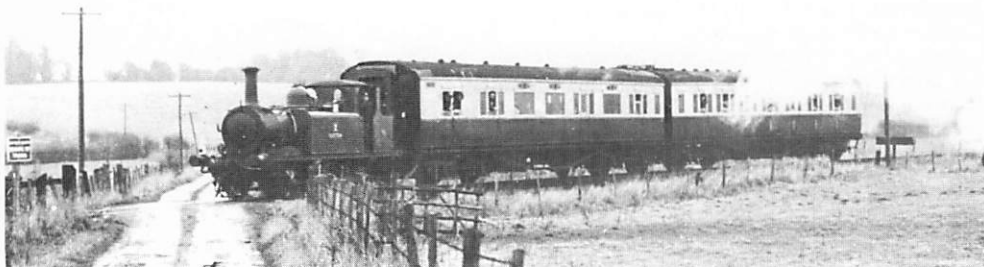
Meanwhile at Tenterden, work too had begun early on getting the station ready to receive the day's passengers. Booking office staff were preparing to issue their first tickets and the bookshop, now transferred into the station building, had stocked up in anticipation of a busy day. A chalked notice announced that trains would leave at 12.30, 14.00 and 15.00, and the "next train" clock proudly indicated 12.30. By 12.00 the station was a hive of activity with many members queuing to get tickets for themselves and their families. Meanwhile "Sutton" had quietly extracted two of the Maunsell coaches from the carriage siding and drawn up into the

platform. The special ex-LT RF bus arrived from Headcorn with a considerably reduced number of passengers due to the ASLEF dispute affecting the trains from London, and at 12.30 sharp the first train of the day was flagged away by Gordon Laming, the Guard. A brief stop at Cranbrook Road crossing and the train was away down the bank, round Orpin's curve and across the main road into Rolvenden. Here the loco was detached and run round on the loop before being coupled to the rear of the train to propel it out to the present limit of operation — a point in the fields approximately half a mile towards Wittersham Road. Quite a few people had gathered at Rolvenden to witness the train cross the main road and then gather speed for the bank ahead — a mile of 1 in 50. However, after tackling the initial climb well, the train slowed to walking pace as the bank stiffened, and it was with a sigh of relief that she made the stop board at Cranbrook Road. The 99 year old veteran had run out of puff, but after a 12 minute delay for a "blow up" she was on her way again, and after an anxious moment just before Tenterden, where the gradient steepens to 1 in 36, the train pulled into the platform just before 13.30.

Time to take on more water and then the next trip. This was uneventful, and with the steam heating switched off, Sutton climbed the bank in fine style, sending a cloud of exhaust high into the still December sky to the delight of photographers and the crowd on Tenterden platform. In fading light the final train of the day was flagged away a few minutes after 15.00 with the last 125 passengers on board.

We carried 350 passengers on that day, the greatest number that Tenterden Station had seen for many years, and the experience gained has since helped us to cope with daily numbers at least twice as much as this, without any difficulty.

'Cornerseat'



"Sutton" rounds Orpin's Curve with the last train of the day on Boxing Day 1973.

A Ride on the Ford Rail Motor in 1935

The article reproduced below (surely written by a woman!) appeared in the Kent Messenger in September 1935 and was accompanied by a photograph which is unfortunately too poor to reproduce. The

two hitherto unpublished photographs shown were taken at Biddenden in 1926 and are reproduced by courtesy of Mr Dobell. The set is the second one, delivered to the Railway in 1924.

KENT'S STRANGEST RAILWAY

STOPS TO LET STRAY CHICKEN OFF THE LINE

In Kent is England's strangest railway line and queerest train. Running daily through the heart of the Weald is a little train which transports one back to the primitive days of railway enterprise.

It consists of a small and ancient locomotive carriage of two compartments and sometimes a small goods truck.

There is an engine at each end of the train so that it is never turned.

When it has to go in the opposite direction the driver goes to the other end of the train and away it goes.

The train covers 15 miles in about an hour and three-quarters.

It starts at Robertsbridge, in Sussex, and goes to Headcorn station. It rarely has a passenger.

When I recently journeyed by it from Tenterden to Biddenden it frequently stopped to let straying chicken get off the line. Sometimes it was difficult to get up sufficient power to pull into the little sidings, such as at St. Michael's.

Grass and wild flowers grow freely on the line. In places weeds brush the windows of the train. One's lunch is thoroughly bumped down by a short ride in Kent's strangest train!

The carriage seats are uncovered, and the driver sits in the same compartment as the passengers—when there are any! There is no funnel to the train.

When the company was formed in 1896 there was a roaring passenger trade, but goods have taken its place. They are still good business.

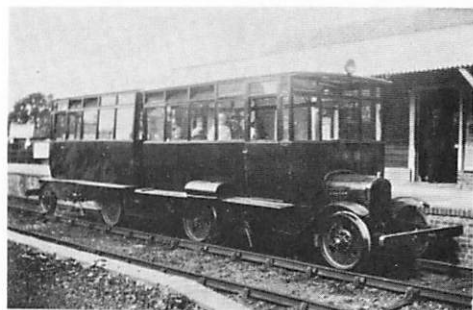
EXPLORE THE VILLAGES

Some of the other trains that use this line are almost as unique.

Frequently they have to stop at wayside stations while the engine goes to the sidings for shunting work, which gives the passengers time to explore the little Kentish villages as they journey through.

If you want to sample what the early railway days were like, take a journey on Kent's strangest line in the queerest train. It leaves Tenterden for Headcorn about 11.20 a.m. each day.

C.B.



Colonel Stephens was amongst the first to see the advantages of petrol railcars and all his standard gauge lines had them except for the East Kent Railway. Even the East Kent would have had them if the County Donegal Railways had not outbid the Colonel for the purchase of two cars from the Derwent Valley Light Railway after that line closed to passenger traffic in 1926.

✱

Stephens first used railcars on the Weston Clevedon & Portishead Light Railway in 1921 when he bought a fairly conventional railcar from the Drewry Car Company. However, apart from a second unit for the WCPLR which he bought secondhand from the Southern Railway in 1934, his other railcars were distinctly unconventional. Most of them were obtained from Edmonds Motors of Thetford and consisted of two-vehicle units converted from commercial road chassis. Each chassis was fitted with an omnibus body and flanged wheels whilst the steering mechanism was removed (steering wheels were left in place — presumably to give the driver somewhere to rest his hands). Each vehicle was then coupled back-to-back with another to produce a 'Duplex Rail Motor Car'. To propel the set only the engine of the leading car was used with the engine of the trailing car in neutral. Once journey's end was reached the driver would put his engine into neutral, walk to the other car, engage the gear there and the railcar could retrace its steps without shunting..

✱

The advantages of such units are obvious despite their bizarre appearance. Fuel costs and wages were dramatically reduced while the cost of the units themselves was relatively low. For the unfortunate passenger, however, there were equally obvious disadvantages. The cars gave an extremely rough ride whose discomfort was augmented by the uncushioned seats. The time saved by avoiding shunting was also no consolation should the set shed a wheel en route as was known to happen from time to time. Even the dignitaries on the inaugural railcar trip over the KESR were betrayed by their steed if an apocryphal tale is to be believed. According to the story which appeared in the 'Farmer's Line' for October 1966 the inaugural railcar arrived with its V.I.P.s at Rolvenden only to find that none of the doors could be opened owing to the height of the platform there and an undignified descent in the goods siding became necessary.

✱

The railcars also suffered certain operating disadvantages. They were not sufficiently powerful

to haul the freight wagons which were usually attached to passenger trains on the Colonel's lines at this time, so conventional locomotives had to be retained for this traffic though this did save the railcar passengers the delays for detaching and attaching wagons at every station which the passengers on 'mixed' trains had to put up with. This problem was dealt with on the Shropshire & Montgomeryshire Light Railway by the introduction of a peculiar hybrid 'duplex' with a lorry at one end and an omnibus at the other. Even without freight to carry it was necessary to find somewhere to carry passengers' luggage. Roof racks were tried on early units but presumably too many overnight bags were thrown off by the vehicles' vibrations as Stephens provided light open baggage trucks from Cranes of Dereham to go with his later units. These were fine if coupled between the vehicles of the units as was done on the West Sussex Railway but on the KESR the truck ran behind the unit thus reintroducing an element of shunting.

✱

Three railcar sets were used on the KESR. The first was bought in 1923 from Edmonds Motors and was based on Ford chassis. An article in the April 1923 'Locomotive Magazine' describes this set. It was painted brown and carried 18 passengers in each car. The point was stressed that a round trip along the line only consumed 1½ gallons of petrol. Surprisingly few photographs survive of this set although it did appear in the 1927 'Railway Magazine'. To allay doubts as to its existence reference may be made to the 'Railway Year Book' and the 'Universal Directory of Railway Officials' both of which record 2 railcars in use in 1924, 4 railcars from 1925 to 1929 and 6 railcars from 1930 onwards. According to the line's Annual Reports one car of this set was disposed of in 1932 to be followed by its companion in 1934.

✱

The first set proved sufficiently successful to justify the purchase of a second in 1924 with aid of hire purchase, payments of £45.4.9d. being made monthly to Edmonds Motors from April 1924 to April 1925. This set was again built on Ford chassis but for some unknown reason only seated 17 in each car. In photographs this set can be distinguished from the first by having a three-paned windscreen instead of two-paned. Like the first set it was delivered with a primitive buffer beam level with the radiator top attached to the body by brackets. After the arrival of a light baggage truck from Cranes of Dereham in 1925 the buffer beam was lowered and a light shackle coupl-

ing fitted. This railcar set continued in use until 1938 at least. It was sold for scrap in 1940.

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In 1930 the KESR bought its third and last railcar set. This came from Shefflex Motors of Tinsley, Sheffield and incorporated several improvements. It seated 22 passengers in each car and was heated by exhaust gases circulating through pipes inside the cars. A top speed of 35 mph was said to be possible but with a speed limit of 25 mph in force on the line it is not known whether this was ever reached. The Shefflex was purchased for the line out of Colonel Stephens own pocket for £750 in return for which he received £938 in 4% debentures. Whether Stephens ever expected a return on his investment is open to doubt. The Shefflex was in fact the last item purchased for the line by the Colonel before he died in 1931.

✱

Unlike its predecessors the Shefflex was numbered. Ironically it was numbered twice, being No.3 when it was delivered and altering to No.2 at a later date, possibly 1937 when it was last repainted. Why the two Ford sets should never have carried numbers and the Shefflex have carried two different numbers is a mystery.

✱

The Shefflex was disposed of in 1940 together with the second Ford though it was probably already out of use before then. The Annual Reports record a significant drop in running expenses for railcars from £160 in 1937 to £30 in 1938 which indicates that little use was being made of them. No figures were recorded for 1939 by order of the Ministry of War Transport but it seems probable that the Shefflex was laid aside at this time.

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The mileages put in by the railcars recorded in the available Annual Reports show that they shared a significant part in the line's operation:

| Year | Railcar Mileage | Locomotive Mileage |
|------|-----------------|--------------------|
| 1929 | 37195 | 55502 |
| 1930 | 33810 | 47380 |
| 1931 | 32064 | 34660 |
| 1932 | 12418 | 32062 |
| 1933 | 10488 | 30282 |
| 1934 | 14604 | 30756 |
| 1935 | 15036 | 33117 |
| 1936 | 14317 | 35074 |
| 1937 | 6262 | 41818 |

Under the economic conditions prevailing during the 1930s the railcars must have played a vital part in saving the line from complete closure despite all their disadvantages. In 1925 the railcars prevented closure of the line in a different sense. When floods closed the line on the 2nd January railcars succeeded in resuming services the next day but it was not until the 5th that locomotives were able to return to service. It is therefore right and fitting that we are still able to offer railcar travel on the KESR. No.20's body and chassis may have come from Swindon but at least the engines came from A.E.C. whose Southall factory proudly proclaimed itself as the home of London's buses!

From the Railway Archives

Elsewhere in this magazine we have reproduced the text of a conversation between George Dobell, who was sometime stationmaster at Biddenden, and Mark Yonge our assistant editor.

A recently discovered letter shows that Colonel Stephens was not always as satisfied

with his staff as he obviously was with George. In 1908 the stationmaster at Biddenden was one, Mr Borner, who received the following letter from the Colonel. Nothing further is known about Mr Borner, except that by 1911 he had been replaced by the unfortunate Mr Palmer at Biddenden!

KENT AND EAST SUSSEX RAILWAY

Telephone
23 Tonbridge
Telegrams
"Stephens, Tonbridge Station"
W1052 Reference

Managing Directors Office,
Tonbridge

October 3rd, 1908

Sir,

Broadstairs say they have written to you 4 times in connection with the local parcels error notes for May, but you take no notice of their letters. The S.E. Coy now write to me complaining of your inattention.

My impression is that you take no interest with your work by the untidy condition of your office. I have had to speak to you several times on this subject.

You have next door to nothing to do at your station and the least you can do is to do the little you have to do properly.

Please take this as a caution.

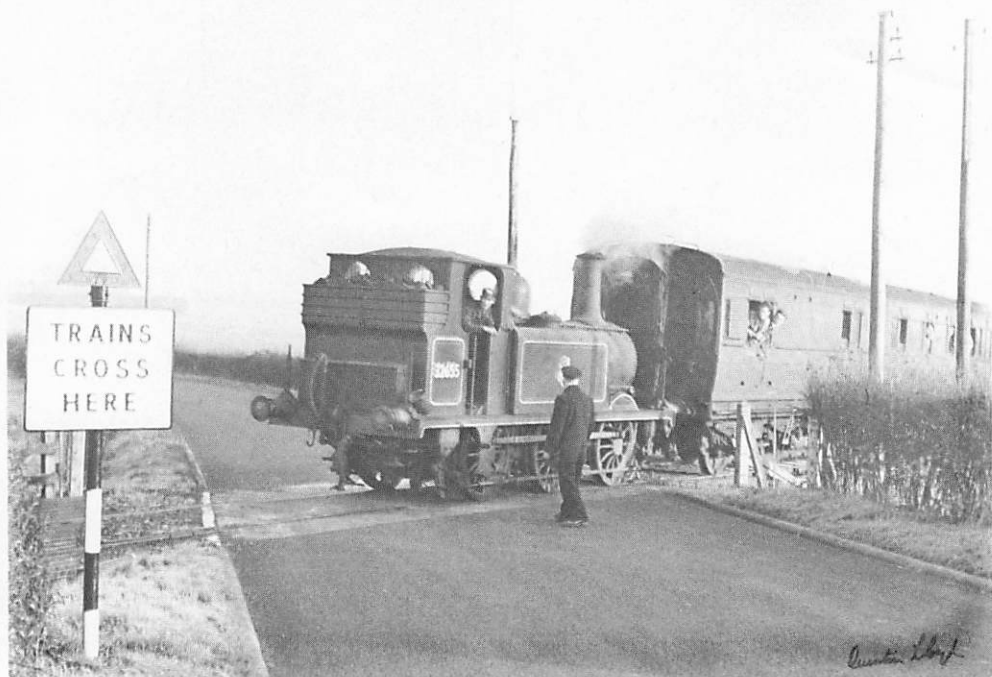
Yours truly

(Sgd) H. F. Stephens



Col. Stephens' offices at 23 Salford Terrace, Tonbridge. [Photo Philip Shaw]

Eheu, Vale!



*Last day — 2nd January 1954. 10.00 am Headcorn to Robertsbridge train at Northiam
[Photo Quentin Lloyd]*

Alas, old friend, your sober speed
Is far from supersonic,
And so your doom has been decreed,
You're dubbed "uneconomic".
We'll have to seek, from that sad day
When you have ceased to function,
Another, and less pleasant way
Of reaching Headcorn Junction.
For those whom you were wont to bear
By marsh and stream and byway,
Must suffer then the wear and tear
Of buses on the highway,
shedding a reminiscent tear
Beside the notice "Trains Cross Here"

Perchance some moonlit night, old friend,
You'll quit the rusty siding
Where you've been left to wait your end,
And we will go a-riding
Through fields where phantom cattle graze
'Mid willow-herb and thistle,
Wraithlike, you'll wind in shadowy maze
And sound your ghostly whistle
In midnight hush, where meadows dream
And rushes whisper by the stream.

Lilian I Seaton

(Written at the time of the closure of the Kent & East Sussex Railway to passenger traffic in January 1954 — with perhaps a hint of things to come!)