

## European Branch to Belgium 11<sup>th</sup> – 13<sup>th</sup> March 2005

When the mini – bus arrived at Blyth at 07:25 on the 11<sup>th</sup> it heralded the start of another trip going year. With Metal Mickey, Standback and Z Troop already safely on board, we were just waiting for the exiled Brummie to join myself and once again the party was whole. I have been traveling round European railway installations for more years than I care to remember, but the first trip each year still excites me and having the same guys around who were in at the start always makes things better!

We were booked on the 13:30 sailing from Dover to Calais our trip was to take in the major depots at Liege and Antwerp plus many smaller depots. We would also try to get to see the class 204 diesels working off Terneuzen. P&O were warning of 2 to 4 hour delays on the service so we decided to head straight for the port and take our chances. I took the wheel; we were surprised at the lack of HGV's on the road (we thought they may all be parked on the M20 in operation stack) and made excellent progress. Pete had brought with him some photos he had taken in his early European spotting days, looking at these passed the time and we were all surprised by the uniforms the engine drivers were wearing (infact we were quite sure one was Adolf!). Strangely, placed at the back of the album were photos of the latest meeting of the Stafford Club, the underground spotting club where membership is only available to a select few, you would think that they would not advertise their meetings.

Encountering absolutely no problems on the road we arrived at Dover at 11:10, went straight through check – in onto the ferry at 11:25 and underway by 11:30. A smooth crossing followed and with no customs problems we were on the road at 14:05. SNCF's 27012 was visible in the yard at Dunkirk but we ignored the remaining locos and headed straight into Belgium. Standback needed his usual pit stop, to mark his territory, and we filled the bus with diesel at the still cheaper French prices, still we arrive at Kortrijk early. The station held just EMU 478, so we headed off to the depot, this was stacked out alas with carriages! The only locos were outside, but did include 9101. A conversation with the depot engineer revealed that the main work of this depot was now coaching stock maintenance, but it was still used to stable locos, mainly at the weekend. We moved off, heading for our hotel, the Ibis at Mons station, we passed EMU 745 at Blaton before we had to do battle with the Mons one way system, unfortunately for us we had entered it at the wrong side and passed our hotel at least twice before finally arriving there. Quickly checking in and dropping off our bags, we then used up the last of the light on the nearby station. Standback cursed at 2701, his last one is 2702, and I put my new digital camera through it's paces. Metal Mickey, dressed like Nanook of the North, attracted the interest of the station staff 'sprinting' after 2158, before the light beat us and we went for dinner. I've never eaten snail vol – au – vonts before (maybe I'll bring some to our next officials meeting, what do you think to that Mr Chairman?), followed by muscles and large quantities of beer, they made a good meal. The exiled Brummie went bo, bos so we all retired early (for us) with no late night visit to the station (are we getting old?).

**Dunkirk Yard (14:20) 27012 Kortrijk Station (15:30) 478 Kortrijk Depot (15:55) 256 309/91 448/61 752 1205 2130 2710 4180 7363 7722 8434 9101 Blaton (16:54) 745 Mons Station (17:50 – 18:50) 219/43/61/65 310/13/27/44/68 470/73/81/83/84/89/90 619 706/75 2112/21/56/58 2214 2622 2701 6328 7825/29 ES510 SNCF 36022/054 67589/595.**

We enjoyed the usual Ibis breakfast, a painless checkout followed and we were on the streets at 07:20 heading to the nearby carriage sidings. Today was Metal Mickey's birthday, he said he was 25, he must have had a very heavy paper round in his childhood! Among the many coaches we found just 3 locos, so we circumnavigated the station and visited the yard, which, incidentally is opposite the main police headquarters. Standback did well to spot 9122 hiding in the trees, we all needed photos of this, and with the ten others stabled here it gave us a good start to the day. Monceau came next, we were surprised to find that the old depot here is being used as a storage site, the roof looked like it was about to cave in when the depot was open, I can assure you it looks no better now! The stored locos raised our total to 52 numbers here and with some elusive locos now stored on film we moved on. Marchienne – au – Pont Station had 6 stabled shunting locomotives stabled in it and 7744 was seen lurking in the Iron works at Marcinelle before we arrived at Marcinelle stabling point. A visit was secured but produced a disappointing 13 numbers and with the nearby Charleroi – Sud Station sheltering just 8 numbers picking were indeed poor. We visited the Infra depot next, here 4 class 62XX diesels rubbed shoulders with shunting loco 8465. We made our way to the

nearby Charleroi – Sud depot, the gate was open so we did not have to deal with the squark box, but an ask got our only negative on the whole trip. The depot was very full and would have bumped up our total by over 50 numbers, but it was not to be. We were passing Châtelet, so called at the yard, it had been lifted! SNCF's 36028 was waiting on one of the two remaining lines with a freight and 7739 passed while we were there. Ronet depot came next, it was not overflowing either, just 27 numbers were at home. This did not bother Standback one bit as 2702 was one of them, you would have thought he'd have bought the beer that night wouldn't you, well you would have thought it! A quick view of Salzines works followed, 15 numbers, then a one hour drive to Liege.

The depot engineer at Kinkempois was happy to allow our visit, 87 numbers were our reward for the walk round. Electric loco 1502, stripped of it's bolt on numbers was inside the shed with 1501 and 18 new class 77 diesels gave a good example of the changing face of SNCB. After saying our goodbyes we did an unscheduled stop at Angleur Infra depot, apparently both Standback and the exiled Brummie had never been here before. 6 locos were at home including 6329 which I needed for a photo. Hasselt depot came next, we were given a guide, who came from Aarchen and spoke excellent English. He does not like class 77 diesels (to slow and not enough power) much preferring the class 55 diesels instead. He showed us all the nooks and crannies allowing us access to everywhere and 40+ numbers. These included DB 225023 & 225026, both being serviced inside the main shed. Round at the nearby Infra depot 8433, 8454 & 8455 were all 'ticking over' and with 6312 + 6320 also here it was well worth it.

Night was drawing in so we made our way to our Hotel at Mechelen, it was in the road works, 20mins walk from the station, we have planned better hotel stops. Malc celebrated spotting 2702 by being last at the bar and Pete celebrated his birthday by sucking the sauce off (without touching the meat) a rack of spare ribs, the hotel staff entered into the spirit by producing a birthday cake, complete with lighted candles, and singing 'happy birthday'. This ended in disaster as the heat generated by the enormous amount of candles, melted the plastic ceiling decorations causing hot plastic 'blobs' to drop with gay abandon on passers by, the fire alarm to ring, requiring a visit from the local fire brigade and 15 people to go to hospital suffering the effects of smoke! Seriously Pete, we hope you enjoyed your birthday surprise and here's to many more. A long session in the bar followed, copious amounts of Brandy flowed freely (mainly down Pete's throat) and we ate all the peanuts, before we were finally persuaded to go to bed.

**Mons Carriage Sidings (07:35)** 775 2140/58 6218 **Mons Yard (07:45)** 2156/60 2214 2701 6213 7377 7736/45 7825/29 9122 **Monceau Depot / Yard (08:40)** 2203/11/20/35/41/45 2633/34 4118 5121/23/31/47/48/50 6240/66/73/86 7301/04/06/09/10/13/14/16/18/21/27/28/32/33/35/39/45/49/77 7737/41/42/47/48/50 7827/30/31/32/33 8439/43 SNCF 36001 **Marchienne – au – Pont Station (09:30)** 468 815 7305/17/20/23/24/25 **Marcinelle Iron Works (09:40)** 7744 **Marcinelle SP (09:45)** 244 597 708 1210 2223/29/36 2341/50 2602/13/25 7314 **Charleroi – Sud Station (10:05)** 536/45 634 703 1342 2143 4603 CFL 3013 **Charleroi Infra Depot (10:15)** 6214/31 6311/20 8465 **Charleroi – Sud Depot [view] (10:25)** 217/56 669 720/76 2122 2709/57 4104/05/18 **Châtelet Yard (10:50)** 483 7739 SNCF 36028 **Ronet Depot (11:30)** 248 328 616/34/44 774 814 1806 2123/31 2321/36/65/73 2702 6215/43/57 6305 7823/26 8235/40/48 9116/54 ES205 **Salzines Works [view] (12:10)** 1801 2305 2511 5217 5525/33 6224/35/69/89 7372/80 7801 8066/68 **Kinkempois Depot (13:25)** 106/83 207 303/11/43/81/87 671/78/94 709/21/25 1501/02 1802/04 2243/50 2329 2555 2601 2711/17/18 5142 5507/08/10/13/15/18/21/23/30/37 5539 6041 6211/16/27/55/88 6306/09/19 7751/52/54/55/56/58/59/61/62/65/90 7815/16/17/18/35/36/38 8205/15/20/21/23/27/28/29/31/34/38/39/45/51/53/55 9143/46/56 9211 ES410 SNCF 36051 **Angleur Infra Depot (14:40)** 6241/74 6329 8444/47/48 **Hasselt Depot (15:35)** 253 342/46/99 408/38/49 510/28/40/60 664 2125/59 2704 4117/29/33/42/43/48 5502/03/17/24/35 7336/57/65/70/75/79 7732 7845/46/52/57/58 9111 DB 225023/026 **Hasselt Infra Depot (16:05)** 6312/30 8433/54/55 **Hasselt Station (16:15)** 395 2111/19 **Mechelen Station (18:30 – 19:10)** 329/36/56/88/98 563/64 807/15/40 973 1181/92 2322.

Chocolate sprinkles on my cornflakes, followed by a large plate of bacon and eggs, how's that for a continental breakfast! A painless checkout was followed by a false start, luckily Metal Mickey realized I'd left the German file in the hotel before we actually left Mechelen, so any delay was kept to a minimum. We were heading to the depot at Antwerp Noord, the last time we were here the Belgium police refused our plea for entry! The entry road had changed, the detour was rather complicated and we passed 6292 in the wagon works before we arrived in the main depot car park. This time we got to see the depot engineer and he granted our request for a visit, a steady walk round found 45 locos in the shed complex, these included the highest numbered class 77 diesel, 7861 and preserved class 51 diesel 5166. Next we drove down to the

holding sidings, again an ask got the nod and in neat lines we found 99 locos. Preserved 201010 rubbed shoulders with a derelict 7209 and 12 class 25 electric locos, a rapidly disappearing class, were also at home. After saying thank you, our nemesis conquered, we headed off out of the dock complex and into Holland, or rather the small bit of Holland 'land locked' in Belgium. It's been a long time since we last visited Terneuzen and the Dutch class 2200 diesels that used to work round this area are long gone. Instead the railway now operates with five ex DB class 204 diesel's, with one of these out stabled at Sas Van Gent, we expected to see four at Terneuzen Depot. Alas only three were there 204366/399/626, 204616 was at Sas Van Gent leaving one outstanding, oh well, we will just have to visit again one day!

We moved back into Belgium and despite being diverted off the main road by a lorry shedding it's load (don't get me started on lorries) we found Oostende depot with very little problem. The introduction of the new build EMU's has almost eliminated loco haulage from this area and the depot now has very few locos on it, just 11 were here today. However, no fewer than four of these were class 16 electrics 1603/04/06/08 and 2117 was needed for a photo, so, as always, the visit was well worth it. The nearby SP held five locos 6210 making a good photo and then a visit to the station found seven further locos but, surprisingly, no EMUs. At this point a phone call to the Ferry operators were still suggesting a 4 to 6 hour delay, as our departure was booked at 18:45, we decided to cut our losses and get to Calais as fast as a beer stop would allow. Loaded with cheap beer we negotiated customs, now on the French side and arrived in time for the 16:20 sailing, which actually left at 16:50, much less of a delay than what was suggested. I took the wheel, we blinded the pilots attempting to land at Standstead and we actually arrived home earlier than planned, not something we do too often!

Many thanks, as always to Pete (the birthday boy) for the planning and Malc for the driving, East Germany comes next, watch this space.

**Antwerpen Wagon Works (08:15)** 6292 **Antwerpen Noord Depot (08:30)** 1330 2010/14/17  
2306/09/10/11/13/45/48/52/58/60/62/67 2609/18/21 2719 5166 7381/85/89/93/95 7401/04/08  
7708/09/43/53/57/63/71/72/74 7853/60/61 8260/65/68 8441 **Antwerpen Noord Holding Sidings (08:55)**  
1212 1320/38/42/46 2023 2322/32/38/74/78 2501/02/03/04/08/09/10/12 2552/53/56/58 2603/07 7209  
7382/83/84/86/87/88/90/91/92/94 7402/03/05/06/09/10 7701/02/03/04/05/06/07/10/11/12/13/15/16/17/18  
7730/31/60/64/73/75/78/79/82/84/85/86/87 7841/42/43/47/48/49/54/55/56/59 8247/49/50/58/61/62/64/66  
8267/69/70/71/72/73/74 201010 CFL 3006/13 SNCF 36017 **Terneuzen Depot (10:35)** 204366/399/626  
**Sas Van Gent (11:20)** 204616 **Oostende Depot (13:00)** 195 460/61/66/71/78/79/86 752/82 1316/56  
1603/04/06/08 2115/17/26 6238 7770 **Oostende SP (13:25)** 1326/45 6210/28 7766 **Oostende Station**  
**(13:35)** 1326 2113/16 2714/30/47 7719.