

European Branch to Lens Open Day 10th – 12 June 2005

We found out about Lens Open day through 'Todays Railways' and thought it would be a good idea to attend. So at very short notice we put a trip together based around the open day and based in France. Seven days before we were due to depart, and again through 'Todays Railways' we found out about the change in attitude by the French authorities towards English Rail enthusiasts. Without going too deep into the reasons it appears that the actions of the mindless few (and you know who you are) has, just as in England, spoiled it for the genuine many. A quick change of plans followed and although we would still be visiting Lens open day our trip was now to be based mainly in Belgium. To this end Metal Mickey, Z Troop and the Standback fusilier arrived at Blyth shortly before 07:00 on the 10th June to meet the exiled Brummie and Myself for the drive to Dover.

Standback had acquired a new mini - bus! A nice shiny new mini - bus and into this we all loaded ourselves for the start of the trip. As is usual when you gain a new vehicle pieces of furniture from the old one never quite fit. Metal Mickey had made extensive alterations to the catering trolley based on the plans supplied by Standback, but after installation on the morning they discovered that the hand brake could not be released, resulting in emergency modifications before we could actually depart! Depart we did and a very easy drive to Dover saw us board the 11:45 sailing to Calais. It was during this drive that we discovered Peter was planning early retirement, this took us all slightly by surprise, but not half as much as we were when Warwick also announced his retirement plans! We certainly are turning into the SAGA branch.

After leaving the ferry behind, we headed off towards Brugge, the catering department sprang into life about an hour into the journey making coffee all round. Being a new mini - bus we now possessed spring loaded cup holders in the front. Being new, these springs are currently at their best, snapping the holders shut faster than Arkwrights till in 'Open all Hours'. Standback, who was driving at the time, becoming it's first 'victim' as the cup holders snapped shut on his left hand! Warwick usually supplies the shortbread biscuits, obviously with retirement imminent cutbacks need to be made and so homemade bikkies were produced (a sign of things to come), which were actually delicious, not one making it to the last day.

All this excitement brought us to Brugge station and our first port of call. In the 30mins we spent here exploring the station and yard 21 numbers were identified. Next came Brugge depot, alas on arrival nothing was at home and it looks as though it has not been used for a while. I hope I am wrong as this is one depot I really enjoyed visiting, finding many an elusive shunter deep within its bowels. We departed the depot and headed straight for our first Hotel at Gent – St – Pieters. Amazingly Malc found a parking space near the city center hotel and even more amazingly he 'shoehorned' the mini - bus into it. After dumping our bags we did the short walk to the main station, a one hour stint (17:05 – 18:05) followed, the station is as busy as ever, freight still passed with surprising regularity but the removal of the class 6200 diesels from passenger service make things a little less interesting. However 80+ numbers were noted during our stop including electric loco 2510 and SNCF's 36055 which both passed on freight.

After the hour had passed, we headed back to the hotel, Malc got the bus out of it's box and we headed to the depot at Merelbeke. On the way small shunter 9152 was noted in the wagon works, we only managed to identify it on the way home though, before we arrived at the depot's main gate to find it shut. Pete went three round with the 'suarke box' and won, entry granted the depot engineer met us outside and asked us not to go inside the main depot but otherwise we could help ourselves. All the depot doors were open and the four things inside were easily identified without the need to enter, forming part of the 69 numbers at home. Among these were NS's 204616, a line of withdrawn class 5100 diesels 5106/07/08/09/11/18/26 and no less than 5 small shunters, 9109/23/32/36/60. Visit over the gate opened to let us out (always a worry) and we re – traced our steps to the hotel. A quick scrub down followed before we crossed the road to 'The Barron' and enjoyed a hearty meal washed down by many a local beer. The excitement over for one day, sleep came easily.

Brugge Station / Yard (15:05 – 15:30) 181 230/48 446/76/79 543/55/63/70 602 706/45 1340/52 2017
2148 2304/22/42/64/77 **Gent – St- Pieters Station (17:05 – 18:08)** 158 225/53/69 304/23/40/65/76/89
416/18/19/25/28/41/42/44/60/63/65/66/68/69/71/77/82/85 528/31/36/49/52/54/56/60/61/62/97 630/75
701/33/61/68 1201/05 1352/60 2110/13/23/31/38/47/48/49 2213 2322/29/43/59 2510 2710/46/49
4154/57/58/59/65/68/69/72/75/79/81/85/89/94/95 6210 7799 SNCF 36055 **Merelbeke Depot (18:45)** 224
338 411/36 623/60 708/18/23 1203/06/07 1306/07/13/53/58 2737 4161/70/71/77/82/83/87/93
5106/07/08/09/11/18/26 6201/02/03/12/28/38/45/52/84 7311/53/56/67/68 7756/66/67/96/97 7801/02/04/05
7806/07/08/10 9109/23/36/60 NS 204616 **Merelbeke Wagon Works (19:25)** 9152 with 2744 passing.

Day two started with a late, for us, breakfast in a very busy breakfast room, Jim and Myself being forced to share with a beautiful young lady and her granny. As Jim is a retired gent, guess which one was his! The younger one spoke excellent English but was totally lost when we tried to explain the purpose of our visit. First call today was the yard at Marchenelle, which as usual, contained a gaggle of electric locos. Permission was granted and a full walk round saw 22 numbers enter our books. We did the short drive round to Charleroi – Sud station only to find it (unusually) empty of stabled locomotives, SNCF's 36006 was there, heading a freight, and diesel loco 7822 passed light engine, otherwise it was just units. As is usual now, we called next at the Infra Yard and once again found this small yard packed with diesel's, no fewer than 5 class 6200 rubbing shoulders with 7359 and 8465. Next we called at the main depot at Charleroi, we were refused entry here when we last called and when the depot engineer asked if we had a photo permit we feared the worst. We told him no and turned to leave, "best not take too many photo's then" he said "enjoy your visit"! Nearly 50 numbers were 'on shed' these included seven class 9100 small diesel shunters, many of which had long ago disappeared from our stock books, green liveried 6314 and a very photographic 2619. After saying our thanks with a bottle of wine, we did the long drive to Stockem, it was made much worse by the intensive road works and horrendous heat, no air conditioning on our new bus, just opening windows.

After what seem like forever we finally arrived at Stockem Depot, a full visit was quickly granted and a troll round the depot followed by a yomp up the headshunt produced 49 further numbers. The numbers were 'bumped up' by many withdrawn locos and DMU's but still represented a good haul for 13:00 on a Saturday. Our cameras were kept busy by 5309/13 5407 & 2012/18/24 classes of locomotive that are now spread far and wide across the system and hence becoming harder to photograph. Next came the North SP at Arlon, it's back in use again and contained 8 electric locos. Arlon station usually provided one or two, if you can get parked, and today was no exception with 15 numbers in total being identified. Extracting ourselves from the car park was quite an ordeal, we managed to stop the traffic in both directions before we were heading off in the right direction for Luxembourg. We were going to make the main depot our first port of call, followed by the yard at Bettembourg, if we had time. However the Luxembourg road repair planning committee had other ideas, their ongoing work causing the road we were following to vanish behind a large mound of broken up concrete and sending us on a diversion which went past the entrance to Bettembourg, guess where we went? There were 19 locomotives stabled in the yard, including no fewer than 7 of the class 1800 diesels, 1802/06/10/12/16/17/20, which made for some excellent photos in the bright sun. French electric 15054 passed with an international service and stainless steel EMU 253 surprised us all by working a train down the Dunderlange branch, excitement over we made our way to the main depot. As is usual here we were allowed a full, unescorted visit, after we signed a disclaimer, and a steady walk round found 72 numbers 'on shed'. Electric loco 3608 has passed into the preservation section of the roundhouse, but classmates 3602/03/12 were all stabled inside the main depot. New build electric locos from the 4000 series were well represented and surprisingly 185520/523 were also still here, they have had their CFL transfers removed and must be on the verge of being returned to their owners, but they were still posing in the sun.

It was now time to do the long drive to Reims, Malc accomplished this in his usual efficient manner and by 18:50 we had checked into our hotel, the Ibis by the station, had showered and were all enjoying our first

beer. A walk down into the town centre gave us a large choice of eating houses and the one we finally settled on did us proud. Garlic snails and large steaks being the order of the day, both dishes being excellent, however the puddings really did finish the meal off in top fashion! We did a late night walk round the station before bed called and we all answered.

Marchenelle Yard (09:40) 162/89 244/65 443 2129/52 2221/23/24/43 2312/57/74 2608/13/15/26 7344 with 1302/29 passing **Charleroi – Sud Station (09:55)** 157 479 555 4102 4603 7822 SNCF 36006
Charleroi Infra Yard (10:15) 6214/17/62 6311/20 7359 8465 with 2757 passing **Charleroi – Sud Depot [Full Visit] (10:25)** 193 209/64 626/28/66 700/20/52/56 806/11/17/25/35/36/44 2378 2619/31 4103/04/07/10/19/20 6213/31/63/85 6314/28 7326/31/37/45/48/61 7748 7823/30 9115/24/25/28/30/34/49
ES510 Main E25 Road, Approaching Stockem (12:50) 505/16 **Stockem Depot [Full Visit] (13:00)** 165 503/09/14/22/23 669/90 740 2012/18/24 2201/05/17/18/25/34/37/42/44/46 2331 2622 4112/15/26 4404/06/08/10 4502/04/08/09/10 5214 5304/09/13/16 5407 7338/41 7725 9135/48/53/59 **Arlon North SP (13:50)** 2002/04/08/16/19/23 2739/43 **Arlon Station (13:55)** 767 2311/16/33/46/50/53/55/66/68/71/73/81 2625/30 **Bettembourg Yard (15:05)** 802/56 906 1001/02/32/54 1802/06/10/12/16/17/20 3004/05/15/20 SNCB 1310/16/36 with EMU 253 and SNCF 15054 passing **Luxembourg Depot [Full Visit](15:45)** 251/55/56/62 445 804/06/58 904/05/07/09/10/11/12 1004/11/22/23/52 1106 1501 1604 1801/07/08/09/14/15 2021 2101/04/05/06 2201/05 3002/03/06/07/08/09/12/13/16/19 3602/03/08/12 4001/02/03/04/05/06/07/09/10/13/14/15/17/19 185520/523 628490/505/506 928490/505/506 PV6 **Reims Station (22:35)** 16615 72138 X4377/84 X4406/12 X73804 X8357/59 X8506 X8603/31 Y7205 Y8524 plinthed Steam 140C313

The breakfast room was far emptier than yesterday, the choice of food was good and we all had our fill before we started the final day with a walk on to the station that produced only 2 numbers. We knew where the SP was located but a tennis club has now been built on the old way in and I bet we made a strange sight to the members with what we were doing! Tergnier station and yards came next, we did not push our luck too much, what with recent goings on, but still managed to collect 17 numbers including 8 Y's (shunters). From here we drove to Lens Depot to partake in the open day, we were warmly welcomed and we certainly were not the only English enthusiasts to visit. The exhibits were excellent, a clearly marked path showed the best way round the depot and nothing was hidden away, even the active locomotives were parked in one line to make easy viewing. We managed to note 80 locos in all, preserved 'crocodile' 14018 looked good in it's blue livery, new electric 37020, in fret green was positioned nicely in the sun, steam loco 150P13 covered the entire area in smoke and rusting hulk of a diesel 65506 showed just how much work the preservation groups actually take on. We took an hour to walk round, enjoyed a beer from the beer tent and started a trend in photographing the model railway, it was well worth it and it may, in the future, be the only way we will be able to visit French depots, lets hope not.

A walk on Lens station found 6 further numbers before we drove on to Bethune. We took care to ask permission to photograph here and the station staff readily agreed to our request, with 2 class 67500's and 2 Y's to go at it was well worth it. The station supervisor at Boulogne Ville was not as keen, but we eventually got the nod and the 9 numbers we collected here became the last of our trip as the dock yard contained just lines of rusting wagons.

We tested out the new vans springs with a call at the cheap beer shop, I'm sure that there is less space in this one and the joined a massed mob of 'Hells Angles' aboard the 16:45 sailing from Calais. The drive home was, for once, in the light so we did not blind any passing pilots as we passed Stanstead Airport.

Once again I must thank Peter for all the planning and Malc for the lions share of the driving, Austria comes next, so watch this space.

Reims Station (08:05) 15040 X73793 **Reims SP (08:30)** 15052 16676 27088 72190 **Tergnier Station / Yard (09:35)** 16042/54/107/614 63754 X4572 X4648 X8378 X8437 Y7225/53 Y7406 Y7501 Y8088 Y8134 Y8203/23 **Lens Depot [Open Day] (11:45)** 12068 13052 14018 16506/512/524/530/535/541/648

16655/712/737/745/757/759/760 17062 22216/218/228/247/262 26062 27023/062/063/065/085/090/093

27095/097/100/109/124/139/150/152 36018 37020 40101/109 62094 63674/685/726/727/734/764/791/878

63890/915 64021 65506 66426/714/732 X4506 X8615 Y6312 Y7122/74/84 Y7207/16/83/85 Y7475 Y7714/26 Y8071/75 Y8169 Y8222 Y8420/81 Y8548 Steam 150P13 **Lens Station (12:50)** 16521/534/554 63876 Y7772 Z24553 **Bethune Station (13:30)** 67591/596 X4584 X8375 Y7558 Y8477 **Boulogne Ville Station (14:50)** 67618 X73749/762/766/770 Y7658 Y8374 Z23502/578