

# Steam Gossip

January 2010

I only managed two trips in December and both of these had an LMS connection. The first was on Sunday 13 December with the *York Yuletide Express* from Liverpool to York with 6201 *Princess Elizabeth*. This was one of the Railway Touring Company's annual Christmas trains, with steam haulage all the way. A 10:18 departure was quite a reasonable time from Lime Street, particularly for a Sunday. Unfortunately the inbound Merseyrail service ground to a halt at James Steet, due to a failed train at Moorgates, which meant completing the last part of the journey to Lime Street by foot. Still, not too far and plenty of time in hand. The stock was coming from Preston that morning, along with Lizzie attached at the rear. Lizzie had spent the night at Preston because the WCML was shut north of Crewe, preventing direct access to Lime Street from Crewe.



## **6201 Princess Elizabeth takes water at Brighouse – Sunday 13 December 2009**

Reasonably on time, the Class 47 drew into the station with Lizzie now at the rear to work forwards to York. The Class 47 would remain attached to provide train heating and to do the shunting at York (plus acting as insurance in case of failure!). First stop out of Lime Street was at Broad Green, but I did not notice anybody getting on there. Then it was next stop St Helens Junction where a sizeable crowd joined. It was then across Chat Moss to Eccles where we went into the Goods Loop to take on water. This was accomplished swiftly and we headed for Manchester Victoria where there was a further pickup. Again, there were a number of joiners here.

Leaving Victoria, 6201 made a steady climb up Miles Platting Bank (very steep 1 in 47 gradient) with its 12-coach train, perhaps having a gentle shove from the Class 47? We took the line to Todmorden and ran through to Rochdale where the last pick

up of the day followed. This is an island platform and the back four coaches were well off the end and this meant that passengers had to be herded through other coaches to get to their seat.

Lizzie pressed on through the Calder Valley, passing through Summit Tunnel near Littleborough, followed by Hebden Bridge before we paused at Brighouse for water. The train was far too long for the short platform here, which deterred passengers from alighting. It was also quite cold so many were content just to sit in the warmth. We completed the watering early and set off for York, running via Wakefield and Normanton. We were around 30 minutes ahead of schedule as we approached York, but had to wait a while whilst other traffic came and went. We eventually arrived in York where passengers had around 2½ hours to visit the city or railway museum. I elected to stay on the train for the short trip to Holgate Sidings, this being the warmer option!

There was a delay leaving York due to watering and coaling over running. We left around 30 minutes late and retraced our steps back to Liverpool. Being out of path was an issue as we were regulated here and there, but did manage to have a very



quick stop for water at Brighouse which made up a bit more time. After Manchester Victoria, we paused in the platform at Eccles to top up the water and then continued back to Lime Street, arriving about 30 minutes late. There was good time in hand for last buses and trains home for the passengers. It was with some relief that the Merseyrail system had sorted itself out and trains were running normally! Even on a Sunday, Merseyrail services run from 07:00 to midnight, which is highly commendable in this day and age when many rail systems pack up after 9pm. There was also a flat rate fare operating on this day of a £1 return (known as a Christmas Cracker!) for a return trip anywhere on Merseyrail! Lizzie and the stock went off to Crewe to bring to a close the day's outing. Apart from some over-running servicing at York, all ran to plan and the passengers enjoyed their wintry day out. Santa and Santa's helpers also had a good day!

This was not quite the end of steam for 2009 as there was still the *Winter Cumbrian Mountain Express* on Wednesday 30 December from Manchester Victoria to Carlisle and back. The outward routing was via Preston and Shap Fells, returning to Manchester via Settle, Blackburn and Bolton. Locomotives for the day were Black 5s 44871 and 45407. 44871 was newly restored for main line use and it had literally just completed its main line test run a few days beforehand. This was a bit close to the wind for liking and no substitute was obvious.

If the previous trip was a civilised start to the day, this one was not and required the 05:38 from Chester to Manchester to join the train at Manchester Victoria. Also, the weather had turned decidedly cold that week and there had been a number of snowfalls over the Pennines and road closures to contend with. Looked like the name of the train would be living up to its expectations!

We left Victoria nearly 14 minutes late due to shunting at Manchester, but both locomotives were performing well as we headed for Preston (via Bolton and Chorley). Picking up at Bolton and Preston, we had all but recovered the lost time by Carnforth where a water stop was scheduled. Both locomotives took water from a road tanker

(milk lorry) and then 44871 had to go into the depot at Carnforth for coal! Presumably its test run activities earlier in the week had used coal that was not replaced? To add to the delay the water tanker had only one working pump so by the time 44871 was back it meant about a 20 late departure. We were now out of path with service trains and had to run the gauntlet with Pendolinos and Voyagers.



Passing through the Lune Gorge – Wed 30 December 2009

As we headed away from Carnforth 23 minutes late, the climb to Oxenholme made good time against the gradients, passing the station at a respectable 49 mph. By now the snow line had fallen heavily and it was a winter wonderland on the Fells. The locomotives were limited to 60mph which meant no high speed run at the banks on this occasion. Grayrigg was taken around 40 mph and speed was built up in the Lune Gorge to just over 60mph before we took on Shap, dropping to 53mph at Greenholme, 46 at High Scales and 40 at the site of Scout Green Box. The M6 was at a standstill as 44871 and 45407 battled against the 1 in 75 gradient. The engines really dug into the climb, and we reached Shap summit at a very creditable speed of 35 mph. Surprisingly there were many photographers out and about on Shap recording the image as we climbed to the summit. This was a 12-coach load with a Class 47 at the rear (only there for heating and not used all day for traction purposes).



### **Black 5s No. 44871 and 45407 run round at Carlisle – Wed 30 December 2009**

Our late running meant that we would be looped somewhere along the line and, sure enough, this happened at Penrith, with a Pendolino , Voyager and 185 passing by. By the time we were underway again, we reached Carlisle some 45-minutes down on schedule which would eat into the locomotive servicing time. Again, I stayed on the stock as Carlisle was a bit slushy and uninviting that afternoon.

The support crew did well to turn round the locomotives to allow a potential on-time departure. This didn't happen as a points failure at the south end of the station delayed all departures by 13 minutes. There was nothing in front of us as we joined the Settle-Carlisle line and we were booked non-stop to Hellifield, being unusual in itself to have no Appleby stop for water. As we headed south over the Settle-Carlisle line, the snow covering intensified as we gained altitude. On the last few miles of the climb to Ais Gill Summit, it was quite bleak and a few brave souls were out at the summit to witness our passage at 45 mph. On through Dent Dale and through Blea Moor Tunnel, we reached Ribbleshead viaduct where the landscape was white over and bleak. There was a strong wind blowing and it was certainly advisable to be inside the train on this occasion. There were some passengers still looking out of the vestibule drop lights, risking hypothermia and frostbite to say the least!

We arrived at Hellifield on time and sat in the Up goods loop whilst both locomotives were detached and sent over to the Down loop for water. The 40-minute allowance for water here was not adequate for one engine let alone two. In fact we were there about 90 minutes which would not bear well further down the line as we would encounter pathing problems on the line to Blackburn and on over Sough to Bolton. We did have to sit at Clitheroe for a while whilst the service train preceded us to Blackburn. We crawled away from Clitheroe and had a further pause at Whalley to allow the section to clear. The climb up Whalley Bank was completed steadily with both locomotives sounding well through the cool night air.



### **Bleak outlook on the climb to Ais Gill Summit – 30 December 2009**

We eventually reached Blackburn where we were told that Network Rail was going to divert us via Farington Junction back to Bolton to avoid the single line on the Sough route via Darwin. It then came as a complete surprise on leaving Farington Jct that we roared along the main line to Wigan then turned left onto the old L&Y route through Ince to Lostock Jct and then Bolton....rare steam mileage !! At one stage I did think we may have been send via Parkside back to Manchester, which would have given the Bolton passengers a problem! My last run over this section was on a diverted Cotton Mill Express that had run from Manchester via Carnfoth, returning via Wigan.

So we were over an hour late back at Manchester Victoria at 20.15, but the two engines had done well. The train of empty coaches was then taken back to Carnforth by 47760 and the steam locomotives were despatched off to Bury, their day's work done. If nothing else, 44871 had achieved a good running in turn and ran faultlessly throughout (other than running out of coal in the morning!). So that basically ended main line steam for 2009. Just the journey back to Chester now, which was competed by Northern Rail being on time and Arriva also playing ball.

So, the Winter Cumbrian Mountain Express concluded a very busy year on the main line in 2009. My next outing will be on 30 January 2010 with the Cotton Mill Express, worked by 6115 Scots Guardsman. Otherwise January will be very quiet which is a good thing bearing in mind the current weather that is blanketing the UK. I will give a more detailed résumé of the main line steam tour plans for 2010, many of these are being released by the promoters now. Looks like another busy year ahead in 2010!

Happy New Year!

David Hughes  
Steam Correspondent