

AROUND THE LONDON STATIONS



As soon as he was old enough,
Ian Horn
forsook Wimbledon for the
attractions of the major London
termini, which were still full of
steam in the 1950s.

Photographs:
Geoff Rixon

There would be three or four of us at the London end of the down fast platform at Wimbledon. You could see a train from Waterloo approaching, about 30 seconds before it got to you, and identify the locomotive almost immediately. Anything coming on the up fast line, though, was harder to identify from the mile or so away that it was. Probably the only indication you might have was from the length of the train, semi-fasts from Salisbury and Basingstoke being generally no more than 6 coaches.

It was 1957 and was the start of my time as a 'gricer'. Wimbledon was only half a dozen stops away from my home in Sutton and was the closest station that wasn't exclusively Southern Electric. I used to spend most Saturdays there and other days during the school holidays. The 4-SUB would trundle in from Sutton for the last half mile to Wimbledon, passing the usual 'Q1' doing a bit of shunting. My memory says that it was always No. 33006. On arrival, I'd have to cross to the down fast platform and for a precious 30 seconds or so, would be 'blind' to any approaching steamer: many was the time that I'd get half a dozen steps from the platform only to have 400 tons of train thunder through.

This is a series of recollections from those years. Although I faithfully recorded the numbers that were 'cops', I didn't ever keep an accurate note of which locomotive was on which train on a specific day. In many ways I wish that I had: the detailed accounts that appear regularly in these pages are a fantastic historical record. This is more my memory of the sights, atmosphere and smells of those times, a far cry from the sanitised environment of today.

The passing traffic at Wimbledon was pretty varied: West of England expresses hauled by 'Merchant Navy' or 'West Country' Battle of Britain' 4-6-2s. Salisbury and Basingstoke semi-fasts passed with 'King Arthurs' or other unnamed 4-6-0s. The Bournemouth/Weymouth trains were again 'Pacific'-hauled, although many had 'Lord Nelson' 4-6-0s, particularly the 'Ocean Liner Expresses' with a Pullman or two included in the rake and which, of course, were going

Left: Nearing the end of its BR career, 'A3' 4-6-2 No. 60103 Flying Scotsman basks in the sun as it waits to back down from King's Cross to Top Shed on August 18 1962.



Above: Spotters watch the activity as 'King' 4-6-0 No. 6021 *King Richard II* prepares to take an express out of Paddington, in August 1962.

Below: Spotters gather around Old Oak Common-based '94XX' 0-6-0PT No. 9420, on empty stock duty at Paddington in August 1962.



► to or coming from Southampton Docks. The down 'Bournemouth Belle' would pass at about 12.45pm and if it had to slow for signals, you would be able to gawp at the passengers tucking in to their silver-service lunch.

The passing of the down 'Royal Wessex' was usually my signal to head off home. As opposed to the West of England expresses which were exclusively Bulleid stock, this train was entirely BR Mk1s. Looking back now, one wonders what market this train was aimed at, with its departure from Waterloo at 4.35pm. Perhaps business people called it a day a bit earlier in those times?

By this time, all the 'MNs' had been rebuilt and to my eye, they made fine-looking engines. However, there was a certain cache about the unrebuilt 'WCs' and 'BBs', but my favourites were the 'King Arthurs'. Whether it was the look of the locomotives or the historical names, I don't know: probably a bit of both. Once the 'Arthurs' had gone, some of the BR Standard '5MT' 4-6-0s allocated to the Southern were given the old names, but they were never quite the same!

The Bulleid 'Tavern Cars' were strange-looking vehicles. For anybody unaware, they were an attempt to create a pub-like atmosphere, with high skylights and mock brickwork on the outside. There was a full kitchen able to serve adjoining meal service vehicles. I've read differing opinions as to whether they were popular vehicles or not: whatever, they were rebuilt as conventional kitchen diners around that time.

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Above: Gleaming Cambridge 'B17' 4-6-0 No. 61652 *Darlington* simmers at the King's Cross stop blocks after bringing in a Cambridge train in summer 1953.

Below: One of the last three 'Royal Scot' 4-6-0s to remain in original form, No. 46163 *Civil Service Rifleman* leaves Euston with a train for Holyhead on June 13 1953.



➤ If you were around at the time, you will doubtless remember the Railrover tickets. Well, certainly if you lived in the London area. Whether they were available elsewhere in the country, I've no idea. Anyway, I used to buy one for what amounted to the LSWR bit of the Southern - I think that it cost 5s 0d (25p), but the memory fades. Whatever they cost, it must have been affordable. For me, it was an opportunity to do Waterloo-Woking, and back, numerous times. On a good day, I could do five round trips. Armed with a timetable, I'd go up and down, up and down, or should I say down and up? Sometimes I'd have to make an important decision: do I take one of the Portsmouth 4-COR electrics in order to ensure that I got back to Waterloo in time for whichever departure was steam-hauled?

After a while, I was given the OK to go further afield - up to London! Why anybody thought that I would be safer closer to home than in London is beyond me, but at the time (as many have said in these pages) there just didn't seem to be a problem.

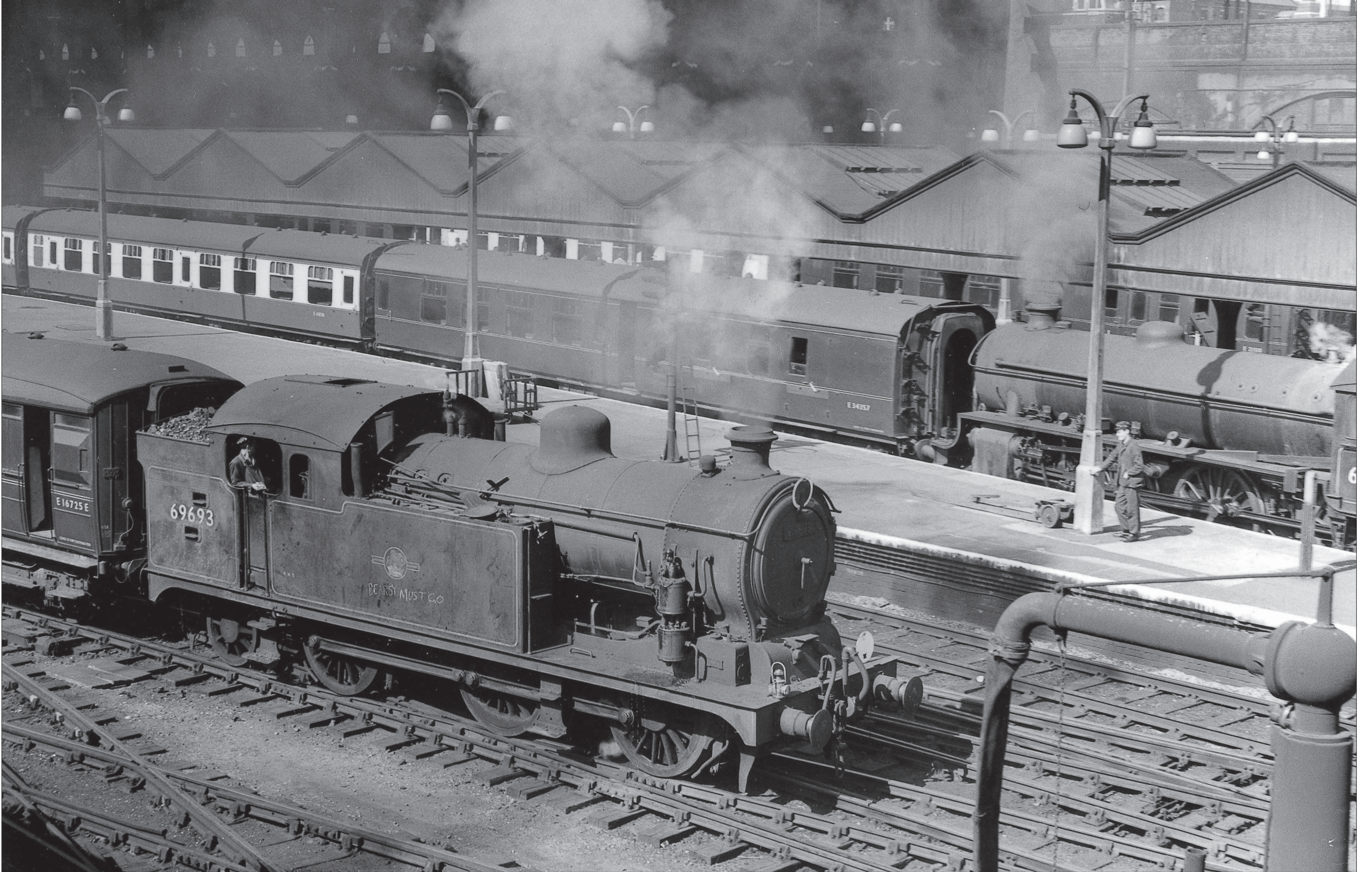
I never spent much time at Waterloo: I could see anything going to or from there at Wimbledon and at speed! Steam at the other Southern termini was getting a bit thin and there was always more profitable time to be spent elsewhere. Euston was a regular haunt. There was one platform on the east side of the station where all the spotters would gather. On arrival, there was always a recently arrived express with its locomotive simmering at the buffers and on one occasion the crew invited me on to the footplate. It was a 'Princess' 4-6-2, but which one, I can't remember.

My abiding memory of Euston is the 'Midday Scot' which always seemed to have No. 71000 *Duke of Gloucester* on the front. It can't always have been the locomotive, but it just seemed that way. Perhaps it was because it was rostered on Saturdays when I would usually have been there. The train of maroon Mk1 coaches always looked pretty smart. On other Scottish expresses, the sight of a maroon 'Coronation' 4-6-2 always looked tremendous.

Virtually next door, St Pancras was always my least favourite station. Even in those days, there was something rather gloomy, dirty and run-down about the place, and the size of the overall roof just seemed out of proportion with the relatively small number of platforms. The locomotives - basically a mix of 'Jubilees' and Black Fives' somehow never appealed to me. In recent years, as I pass through the 'new' St Pancras from time to time, the contrast is marked.

But then King's Cross! First of all, and as a complete contrast to St Pancras, its slightly cramped and (by comparison) low roof just seemed to concentrate the sounds and smells at the bufferstops. I returned to King's Cross not so many years ago and I swear that I could still smell the mix of oil and steam that pervaded the place 50 years before. I think that for me the destinations helped as an attraction. They were much further afield than (for example) those from St Pancras.

When I wasn't at Euston for the 'Midday Scot', I would be at King's Cross for the 'Queen of Scots', which was always at the 'open' platform at the end of which all the spotters would congregate. I would walk the length of the train, gazing at the immaculately laid tables in the Pullman cars. The thing about that train was that the coaches were all pre- or immediate post-war vehicles: just so much nicer than the Metro-Cammell ones that were introduced in 1960/1. The 1st class supplement to



Edinburgh was 14s 6d (72.5p) in 1962.

Usually, you'd get sight of the luncheon menu - Cream of Vegetable Soup, Roast Beef with Yorkshire Pudding and Vegetables of the Day, Apple Pie & Custard. I've looked in my 1962 timetable and luncheon then was priced at 12s 6d, which today apparently equates to about £11 - a lookup on the internet shows that the only rail operator offering a proper at seat meal service (FGW) would want to charge you \$40 or so for a three-course meal. In those days it was all served in coaches with such glamorous names - *Ursula* and *Evadne*. It all seemed, in fact it was, extremely 'upper class'. My ham sandwiches were poor fayre by comparison!

Before long, the locomotive would emerge from Gasworks Tunnel and back up to the head of the train for its midday departure. It was usually an 'A1' rather than an 'A4' and

eventually the train would move off with the passengers placing their orders for pre-luncheon drinks. About eight hours later, the express would arrive in Edinburgh. Living now in southern France and making the journey of similar length from Avignon to Paris by TGV in 2hrs 40 minutes, things have moved on! No meals at seat now, though.

The thing about King's Cross was that you could never take your eyes off the tunnel portals. You never knew what was going to burst into the daylight from the murky depths. As for departures, there was nothing like standing alongside an A4, coupled up to its train and waiting, like a slumbering giant, for the 'off'.

I was always a bit ambivalent about Liverpool Street. By that time, it was almost exclusively 'Britannia' 4-6-2s on the Norwich expresses. Somehow, they never really

caught my imagination. The thing that I remember most was the station pilot - an 'N7' 0-6-2T lined out in red and which never seemed to do much other than loiter and pose around the station. A lovely locomotive, though.

And so to Paddington, my favourite place. I can't begin to imagine the hours that I must have spent there. It had a wonderful booking hall, with floor to ceiling wood. Again, there was the long 'free access' platform, at the end of which all the spotters used to gather. It has been said thousands of times before, but it bears repeating: the Western Region (or should we say GWR?) was just that bit different. The station had a certain symmetry about it. The locomotives were the same, appearing to be 'batting above their weight' for their apparent size.

The rakes of chocolate and cream Mk1

Above: The early 1950s at Liverpool Street. Ipswich 'B1' 4-6-0 No. 61254 does a turn on empty stock duty while 'N7' 0-6-2T No. 69673 of Hertford East (30B) leaves with a local to Hertford.

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coaches, with the occasional pre-war catering vehicle slipped in to the formation, always looked spectacular. The 'Bristolian', 'Royal Duchy', 'Mayflower' and of course the 'Cornish Riviera' were a picture to the eye. Even a humble Worcester express, with a mixed bag of coaching stock and brought in by a 'Hall', would be a great sight.

For me, you couldn't beat a 'Castle' for its looks. Everything was right about it, whereas a 'King' just looked a bit too 'chunky' for my taste. 'County' 4-6-0s were pleasing too, though, but for some reason never seemed all that popular with the enthusiast community.

For a change, I would sometimes take myself down the line to Ealing Broadway, where you could see the trains pass at speed. The only problem was that the Birmingham (and beyond) trains had disappeared off in a north-westerly direction shortly after departure from 'Padd', but there was still plenty of West Country traffic.

So that was it: probably three or four years of weekly visits until the number of diesels had outnumbered the steam locomotives and school studies had become too demanding. Great days! The sun was always shining, it was never cold - and it NEVER rained! ☺