

Article by Mick Horobin, former long time resident of Spondon, who spent many happy hours spotting at Spondon Station in the 1960s with lads Iain Wilson, Mick Mosley and others.

Like many lads in the 1950's & 60's, I had a passion for watching steam trains and inevitably became a train spotter. Living just south and west of Derby which was of course a massive railway town at that time; I regularly headed for Five Arches Bridge, at the north end of Derby Midland station. In those days it was packed with young school boys, teenagers and quite a few men enthusiasts, all of whom were there to witness the stirring spectacle of steam and smoke as our favourite engines puffed by. Some of the happiest times of my life were spent on that bridge when I was sustained with only a few sandwiches and a bottle of pop and perhaps if I was lucky a packet of crisps with its little blue bag of salt enclosed. Some lads tried to man the platforms on the station and others favoured the London Road Bridge which was adjacent to the engine sheds. From my viewpoint however, 5 Arches was definitely the place to spot as you witnessed virtually everything coming into or going from the station and additionally you didn't miss anything entering or departing Chaddesden Sidings.



Britannia Pacific

There were plenty of freight and goods trains in those days hauled by classes of locos' that all had nick names; Duck sixes, eight freights, Crabs and Blackies. Express passenger trains were often named and the engines pulling them sported headboards at the front and on top of their smokeboxes – The Devonian, Thames-Clyde express and The Palatine were all crack named services that ran through Derby. These prestige trains were pulled by equally splendidly named locos'- Jubilees, Royal Scots, Patriots, Britannia classes and others – all boasted names and tributes to past celebrations of Empire and our former status when over half the map was pink. Certain Jubilees were amongst my favourites, number 45662 'Kempfenfelt' being my absolute top choice to see, steaming along. The majority of Jubilee loco's were named after places that were formerly British provinces and Empire locations; 'Hong Kong', 'New Brunswick', 'Gibraltar', 'Rhodesia', 'Gilbert and 'Ellice Islands,' were all found in the form of brass nameplates positioned above driving wheels and connecting rods.

Collecting numbers to record what I had seen was followed by taking photo's on an early 35mm camera, firstly black and white prints and then colour slides; many of which I still have and jog the memory box from time to time. As a gardener for the old and much celebrated Derby Parks Department, I sometimes had opportunity to view trains during my working hours but most of these locations offered distant viewing rather than close up. As I reached my late teens and early twenties, I ventured further afield to see different types of locomotives working on the railways in other parts of the country. I also joined the local Notts' and Derbys' Railway Circle and went on many of their trips covering virtually every area of Britain.

For many today it will be a constant puzzlement as to why so many youngsters back then had such an interest in trains; simply it was a super hobby that both informed and taught as well as an interest: the steam loco in particular has a variety of sounds, smells and actions and almost has a personality. Now in my retirement years I often reflect as many others do on earlier times; my home town and area features heavily in my thoughts and particularly my days watching the trains go by. Derby of course is still a major railway centre; and thank goodness for that, but for my generation, steam power and for me Derby built locos' especially, are right up there alongside Elvis.