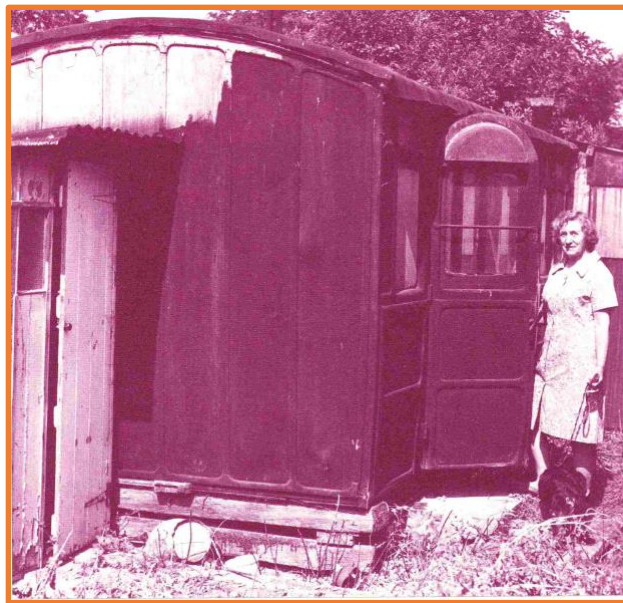


The Old Railway Carriage.

By John Clements

On the morning of 29th August 1974 a low loader drove into Longcot Road, Shrivenham. It had come to collect an old railway carriage which had been situated in a farmyard since 1940. It was due to be transported to London by the London Transport Museum (LTM) who had acquired it earlier that year. Initially it went to Syon Park before finally arriving at the Acton depot of the museum.



The Carriage in use as a domestic dwelling

The carriage was opposite Beehive Cottages in the farmyard belonging to Harold "Rimble" Knapp. This area is now the top of Catherine's Close which is named after his daughter. Her husband John Gould arranged for the carriage to be swapped in return for an old Metropolitan seat which was on Amersham Station. A nominal sum of £39.50 also changed hands. He tells me that when he suggested that the LTM acquire the old carriage they sent a man down, a Mr Silverlock, who was convinced that the carriage would be rotten. Mr Silverlock took a large screwdriver and tried to punch a hole with it through the bottom of the coach, nearly dislocating his shoulder in the process. Unfortunately, all the photos that John Gould took at

the time were lost when his three-year old daughter opened his camera whilst the film was still in it.

It is possible to trace the history of the carriage from the time it was built up to the present.

The carriage was built by Cravens of Sheffield in 1892 and its official number was 353. It was a Jubilee model so named as the original coaches were built in 1887, the year of Queen Victoria's Jubilee. It was a first-class carriage with four compartments. It had four fixed wheels. It was made for the Metropolitan Railway (MR). The Jubilee carriages were originally used on the Circle Line as the bends on that line were too sharp for the larger carriages originally used. In fact, it was noticed that on one particularly sharp bend the wheels of the larger carriages tended to lift off the rails. After electrification of the Underground our carriage was used on the extension of the MR to Richmansworth and Aylesbury, but the short wheelbase made it unstable and uncomfortable if running at speed. Fairly soon after its introduction, the MR decided to buy larger bogie carriages and then later changed to running electric trains rather than steam on the Underground. By 1905 the only steam trains run by the MR were the long-distance trains and it decided to dispose of the Jubilee stock. They found a ready market for their fairly new carriages and sold them to light railway companies throughout Britain.

Our carriage along with six others was sold to the Weston, Clevedon and Portishead Railway, known as the WC & P. As the initials suggest this was a very different company to the MR. It was never a very profitable line. The original livery from the MR was brown varnished wood. When it came into the ownership of the WC & P, the ends of the carriages were painted red. The red paint used by the WC & P varied considerably in colour.

Initially the seven carriages were split up into two close coupled sets of three with a floater, our carriage being the floater. Subsequently the carriages were then split into three sets of two, again with a floater. The carriages had short buffers and a hole was cut at the end of each carriage just five foot high. This hole was guarded by a locked door which was opened by the ticket collector to enable him to make his way from carriage to carriage as he made his way down the train to collect the fares. Sometimes he would make his way down the outside of the

train using the running boards. The only recorded accident was when the ticket collector fell off into a bramble bush. I doubt whether this arrangement would be fully approved by the Health and Safety Executive nowadays. Inside the coaches a passageway was cut through the compartments. Our coach being the floater could be joined up to either of the two sets of carriages. This resulted in it having crude doors of different designs at both ends. As a first-class carriage on this railway was largely superfluous, seating from redundant stock was used to replace the interior of our carriage. Wooden benches were placed down the side of the carriage looking inwards whilst at both ends a two-seater bench was installed. This carriage could be conveniently used for excursions.



The Carriage with the restoration underway

Most of the modifications of the carriages seem to have been carried out before 1911 when Col Stevens took over the running of the railway. He was known for the efficient running of his railways and never spending a penny more than was absolutely necessary. By the time of his death he was in charge of just under twenty railway companies.

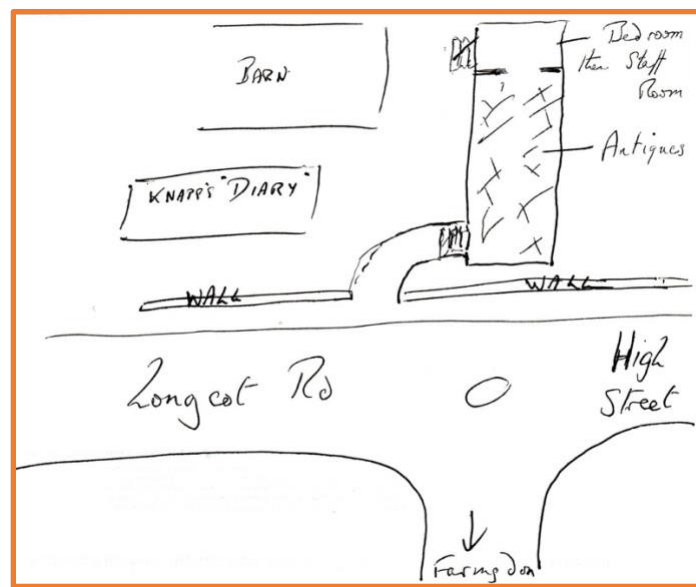
All these carriages continued in use until 1940 when the railway closed. Its stock was taken over by the Great Western Railway which took them to Swindon where they were either sold or scrapped. At least three carriages were sold and taken to Shrivenham.

In the 1930's the Army had acquired Barrington Hall and used it initially as an anti-aircraft unit. It was known for having very clear nights and good visibility. However during the war the Army had turned it into a training camp for newly commissioned officers. These men needed to buy new uniforms. These were supplied by military tailors who used the carriages as showrooms and workshops. Some of the carriages ended up near where the Shrivenham Business Park is now situated. Our carriage however ended up in Knapp's farmyard where it was used by Walters of Oxford, a major military tailor. All the major military tailors and outfitters had a presence in Shrivenham. In the 1970s Len Fielder and Alice Foster who had both been military tailors during the war were still living in the village. The owner of Walters tells me that this was a boom time for military tailoring and the dividends paid out to shareholders at this time were huge. He thinks it is likely that the actual cutting was done in London with the final fitting done in the village.

Later the carriage became a Social Club for the American Air Force. It then became a home for several families at least one family still live in the village

Christine Edwards remembers it was lived in by George Barrett and his partner. They left the carriage to move into the Memorial Hall to be caretakers at the Hall. George's son used to ride on the buffers whilst George polished the floor. Chris moved into the carriage after she got married in July 1954. It had been converted into a mobile home and had all the original windows. They had their three-piece suite, a cooker, a little combustion stove which was cleaned with black lead polish. The caravan "*The Railway Carriage*" was in Rimbill Knapp's yard. It had a lean-to attached to it which had running water. The toilet was a bucket which her husband had to take to Longcot Road to empty into a hole which her husband had to dig daily. She lived there for about two years during which time her daughter was born. She had trouble with the pram which was too big to get into the door. She had to remove the body from the wheels. To the left of the carriage was the dairy which was also used as a betting shop which was run by a Jewish gentleman, Mr Jacobs from Oxford, known locally as, "*Judas Iscariot*". I have been told that the rent was £8 per week.

It was then used as a cobbler's by Jessie Miller before he moved further down the High Street. Its final metamorphosis was as an Antique Shop in the '60s. The antique shop was run by Jane Barton-Bourne and her assistant Hazel Berry-Benton. Sylvia Berry-Benton remembers her mother sitting in a little room (smoked filled) at the end of the carriage which had previously been the bedroom. There were a few steps down to the backyard which faced a large barn. They still needed a bucket! The carriage was situated behind a wall along Longcot Road. There was a short path leading to the front door of the carriage which was packed full of antiques. The address was The Railway Carriage, Hornes Corner, Shrivenham.



Map showing the location of the Railway Carriage - artist unknown

When it finally moved to London it was painted blue-green and also had been creosoted. During its restoration it was found that the original roofing material was still present and that subsequently the WC & P had added two further coverings and that there were five layers in all. The body was made of teak and all the layers of paint had not really penetrated into the wood which has made the removal of all the paint fairly easy.

The other carriages in the area were all badly decayed and finally disappeared in the '70s and '80s. It is clear that a lot of old railway carriages were used in the country after the war for a variety of reasons. I know of at least two others that were in the village at this time. Presumably they were cheap and easily available during the difficult times and housing shortage of the '50s when there was a great lack of resources.

After its transfer to London, the carriage eventually ended up in LTM's Acton site. Initially it was thought that it might be cut up into one or two compartments for restoration and display. Luckily this was never carried out and it was left almost forgotten in Acton. Recently there was a realisation that the carriage was a unique survivor. With the help and advice of Brian Janes of the Col Stevens Museum it was decided to restore this artefact to its original state. Funds were obtained from the Heritage Lottery Fund with a contribution of up to £150,000 from the Friends of LTM. The contract was awarded to the Boston Lodge Works of the Ffestiniog Railway and in August of that year the carriage was transported to North Wales.

It is hoped that this work will be completed by 2013 which is the 150th anniversary of the Underground and that once more the carriage will be pulled along the rails by a steam engine - perhaps through the underground?

I am greatly indebted to many people in the village for all the help and information that they have given me, but especially to Brian Janes, of the Col Stevens Museum, and John Gould. It is possible to see pictures of the carriage both in Brian Janes's article "A Great Survivor - Weston, Clevedon and Portishead Carriage No 7" and on the Ffestiniog and Welsh Highland Railway website in their article "Ffestiniog goes standard gauge" In the later there is a picture of Mrs Knapp standing outside the carriage when it was in Shrivenham.

Mr Knapp was a well known local character and farmer. During the war he was very involved in the Shrivenham Home Guard and as one of the few car owners took the local volunteers for shooting practice near the Swindon to Wantage road. He had a pet ram which was known to keep unnecessary guests like Income Tax Inspectors at bay. He was also an enthusiastic pigeon racer in great competition with his friend and neighbour although they tended to avoid each

other if the other one's pigeons had been more successful. On coming into the village there was a large sign for Knapp's Dairy. His daughter told me that the well known spelling of Knapp's Dairy was deliberate as although he still sold milk he no longer milked his cows to sell their milk locally. She said that he thought by this ploy he might discourage customers from expecting home produced milk. Most of the old villagers tended to have nicknames. His daughter said that she was sure his was Rimbo, yet others in the village have called him Rimbill and Rimble. It could be that this name came from his skill in running especially whilst his shoes were tied to tin cans.

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