



# LONDON'S RAILWAYS

1967-1977

A SNAP SHOT IN TIME



JIM BLAKE

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# ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**JIM BLAKE** was born at the end of 1947, just five days before the 'Big Four' railway companies, and many bus companies – including London Transport – were nationalised by the Labour government under Clement Attlee.

Like most young lads born in the early post-war years, he soon developed a passionate interest in railways, the myriad steam engines still running on Britain's railways in those days in particular. The busy North London Line on which locomotives of both LMS and LNER origin could be seen was just five minutes walk away from his home, and he can still remember being taken to a bomb site overlooking Canonbury Junction in his pushchair to see them.

However, because his home in Canonbury Avenue, Islington was also just a few minutes walk from North London's last two tram routes, the 33 in Essex Road and the 35 in Holloway Road and Upper Street, which ran through the famous Kingsway tram subway to reach Victoria Embankment and south London, Jim developed an equal interest in buses and trolleybuses to that in railways, and has retained both until the present day. In addition, Jim's home was in the heart of North London's trolleybus system, with route 611 actually passing his home, and one of the busiest and complicated trolleybus junctions in the world at The Nag's Head, Holloway, a short ride away along Holloway Road. Here, the overhead wires almost blotted out the sky!

Jim was educated at his local Highbury County Grammar School, and later at Kingsway College, by coincidence a stone's throw from

the old tram subway. He was first bought a camera for his fourteenth birthday at the end of 1961, which was immediately put to good use photographing the last London trolleybuses in North West London on their very snowy last day a week later. Three years later, he started work as an administrator for the old London County Council at County Hall, just across the road from Waterloo Station, where in the summer of 1967, the last steam engines hauling passenger trains in the south of England would run.

By now, Jim's interest in buses and trolleybuses had expanded to include those of other operators, and he travelled throughout England and Wales between 1961 and 1968 in pursuit of them, being able to afford to travel further afield after starting work! These journeys tied in perfectly with visiting engine sheds up and down the country, particularly in the northwest England where the last steam engines would run in 1968. He also bought a colour ciné-camera in 1965, with which he was able to capture what is now very rare footage of long-lost buses, trolleybuses and steam locomotives. Where the latter are concerned, he was one of the initial purchasers of the unique British Railways Standard class 8, No 71000 *Duke of Gloucester*, which was the last ever passenger express locomotive built for use in Britain. Other preservationists laughed at the group which purchased what in effect was a cannibalised hulk from Barry scrapyard at the end of 1973, but they laughed on the other side of their faces when, after extensive and innovative rebuilding, it steamed again in 1986. It has

since become one of the best-known and loved preserved British locomotives, often returning to the main lines.

Following the demise of British Railways steam engines in 1968, Jim began to take a more specific interest in London's Underground railway. In particular, the short and isolated Northern City Line, which literally ran beneath his original home on its way from Finsbury Park to Moorgate but which should have been greatly extended to cover the London & North Eastern Railway's branches from Finsbury Park to Highgate, Alexandra Palace, East Finchley, High Barnet, Mill Hill and Edgware, became a 'pet theme'. Work on this extension had to be put in abeyance during Second World War, and despite much work having been completed on it, the scheme was abandoned in the early 1950s and as much as £3,000,000 (at 1939 values) of public money thereby wasted. With co-author Jonathan James, Jim published the first definitive book on this scandalous waste, *Northern Wastes*, in 1987 and that book has subsequently gone through three reprints.

Although Jim spent thirty-five years in local government administration, with the LCC's successor, the Greater London Council, then Haringey Council and finally literally back on his old doorstep, with Islington Council, Jim also took a break from office drudgery in 1974/75 and actually worked on the buses as a conductor at London Transport's Clapton Garage, on local routes 22, 38 and 253. Working on the latter, a former tram and trolleybus route, in particular was an unforgettable experience! He was recommended for promotion as an inspector, but rightly thought that taking such a job with the surname Blake was unwise in view of the then-current character of the same name and occupation in the *On the Buses* TV series and

films, and so declined the offer and returned to County Hall!

By this time, Jim had begun to have his transport photographs published in various books and magazines featuring buses and railways, and also started off the North London Transport Society, which catered for enthusiasts interested in both subjects. In conjunction with this group, he has also compiled and published a number of books on these subjects since 1977, featuring many of the 100,000 or so transport photographs he has taken over the years.

Also through the North London Transport Society, Jim became involved in setting up and organising various events for transport enthusiasts in 1980, notably the North Weald Bus Rally which the group took over in 1984, and has raised thousands of pounds for charity ever since. These events are still going strong today.

In addition to his interest in public transport, Jim also has an interest in the popular music of the late 1950s and early 1960s, in particular that of the eccentric independent record producer, songwriter and manager Joe Meek, in whose tiny studio above a shop in Holloway Road (not far from the famous trolleybus junction) he wrote and produced *Telstar* by The Tornados, which became the first British pop record to make No1 in America, at the end of 1962, long before The Beatles had even been heard of over there! When Joe died in February 1967, Jim set up an appreciation society for his music, which has a very distinctive sound. That society is also still going strong today, too.

Jim also enjoys a pint or two (and usually more) of real ale, and has two grown-up daughters and three grandchildren at the time of writing. He still lives in North London, having moved to his present home in Palmers Green in 1982.



# INTRODUCTION

This collection of photographs dates from the period 1967 to 1977, a time when London's railways were undergoing a great upheaval. Not only did this period see the final withdrawal of steam traction from both British Railways and London Transport use, it also saw the demise of many of the early diesel and electric locomotives and multiple units on both systems. At the time the earliest of these pictures were taken, the latter did not have much of a following amongst serious railway enthusiasts – including myself – but some forty to fifty years later, many early British Railways diesels which have survived into preservation are now just as popular on Britain's heritage railways as steam locomotives. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said of most of the early British Railways electric rolling stock and most of that of London Transport origin, due to the obvious operational limitations – particularly with the fourth-rail method of current collection used on the Underground.

My own interest in London's railways is typical of that of a youngster born in the early post-war years: in fact I was actually born just five days before British Railways took over the 'Big Four' main line companies on 1 January 1948! In those days, most young lads were 'trainspotters' and I was no exception, especially as I was brought up in Canonbury, near to the busy North London Line and also with such places as Finsbury Park, Kings Cross, St. Pancras and Euston stations a short bus (or trolleybus!) ride away. Because we had North London's last

trams on our doorstep, as well as the largest trolleybus network in the world in the area, I gained an equal interest in London Transport's bus, coach, tram, trolleybus and underground operations. We had, in fact, the latter's stunted Northern City branch running directly beneath our home in Canonbury Avenue!

Unfortunately, by the time my 'spotting' interest had developed into the more serious one of transport photography, most steam engines working in the London area had been replaced by diesel or electric traction – with the notable exception of the former London & South Western main line of the Southern Region out of Waterloo. By chance, when I left school at the end of 1964, my first job was as a technical clerk for the chief engineer's department of the London County Council at County Hall – just across the road from Waterloo Station. So at least I was able to record on both still and ciné-film steam operation on that last London main line until its final demise in July 1967.

By this time, my interest in buses and trolleybuses had taken precedence over that in railways, photographically speaking, and other than making several treks up to the northwest for the last British Railways steam engines of all, did little railway-wise. Indeed, as it was also for various friends of mine brought up on steam, it was virtually taboo for me to photograph diesels or electrics, other than the latter on the Underground!

However, that began to change as early BR diesel and electric types began to be replaced

as the 1960s drew to a close. In particular, the pre-war Southern electric units which I saw most work-days at Waterloo became more interesting to me.

Aside from locomotives and rolling stock, I have always had an interest in railway architecture, particularly stations. There were still a good few disused stations in my local area, notably on the former Great Northern branches from Finsbury Park to Highgate and Alexandra Palace which should have become part of London Transport's Northern Line in 1940. The story of that uncompleted project has always been close to my heart, and indeed I published the first definitive book on the subject, *Northern Wastes*, in the 1980s. Therefore the photographs in this book also include some of interesting and disused stations as they were in the late 1960s and 1970s, along

with a few illustrating the wasted works on this uncompleted Underground extension as it was then.

I have arranged the photographs in this book in a series of 'themes', rather than in chronological order. Although much of the material included relates to British Railways and LT Underground lines in my local North London area, not all of it does and therefore I hope readers will find this to be a reasonable coverage of railways in and around London. I have, generally, taken the former London Transport area as the limit of geographical coverage.

My thanks go to Colin Clarke and John Scott-Morgan for their help in putting this book together.

Jim Blake

9 November 2014



On 6th June 1971, a brand new train of C69 Stock passes West Hampstead station with a special bound for an open day at Neasden Depot marking the passing of steam trains on the Underground. These units replaced CO/CP stock on the Circle and Hammersmith & City Lines, and remained in service until the spring of 2014.

# GREAT NORTHERN SUBURBAN

The Great Northern suburban lines, running from Kings Cross, Broad Street and Moorgate (City widened lines) are those, on the former British Railways network, that I have always known best. Not only have I always lived locally to them, but I also have fond memories of seeing sturdy little Gresley N2 class 0-6-2Ts hauling their rakes of quad- or quint-art carriages through Canonbury Junction (where as a very small child I can remember being taken in my pushchair to a bomb-site to watch them) or at Kings Cross and Finsbury Park – including on the ill-fated shuttle service from the latter to Alexandra Palace, withdrawn in July 1954. Also, an aunt and her family who had lived in Highbury Hill moved out to Stevenage New Town in 1956, and we often visited them at the very time when steam was giving way to diesel traction: more's the pity I was too young then to have been able to photograph the changing

scene! I even commuted in the end on these lines, from Palmers Green to Highbury & Islington, between January 1989 and my retirement at the end of 2000, from my last job as a senior administrator at Islington Council. Ironically, the Class 313 electric units introduced to these services in 1976, when the link to the former Northern City Underground line from Finsbury Park to Drayton Park originally built for tube trains running to Highgate and Alexandra Palace in 1939 was finally brought into use, and which I travelled on, are still in use as this book is put together in the summer of 2014. They are now the oldest passenger rolling stock in regular commuter use on the entire national rail network – except for the 1938 stock former tube trains on the Isle of Wight, which are the same type the Class 313 units replaced on the former Northern City Line between Drayton Park and Moorgate when they were new.



Typical of Great Northern suburban services in the period this book covers prior to electrification, Brush 2 diesel No.5626 has arrived at Welwyn Garden City with a down stopping service in the summer of 1973. The splendid Great Northern signal box seen here will also be swept away when electrification of these services takes place some three years later.





On 13 October 1972, English Electric Type 4 diesel, No 278 departs from the original Stevenage station with the down *Cambridge Buffet Express*. This station was situated to the extreme north of Stevenage 'old town', which itself was north of the huge new town established a few years after the war, part of which was in fact closer as the 'crow flies' to Knebworth station. But a new station to serve the New Town centre, which was directly beside the main line just north of Langley Junction, did not figure in the development plans for the new town and would not materialise until 1973! I well remember how the old station buildings here would rattle as express trains thundered through, particularly when hauled by an A4 Pacific or a Deltic diesel. Also of note in this view is the BR-style totem sign still in use, along with gas lamps; a new road bridge has been built just north of the original one, which will be demolished upon electrification.

RIGHT: Seen from the 'spotters' observation platform' erected by the London County Council in Finsbury Park beside the junction of the Great Northern main line and the branch to Highgate and Alexandra Palace in the late 1950s, a three-car Derby-built DMU heads for Kings Cross on the up local line on 14 October 1972. DMUs of this type had replaced some of the original Cravens units, as well as locomotive-hauled trains, on Great Northern suburban services in recent years.



Cravens diesel units were, however, still employed on such services until replaced by electric units in 1976/77. On 27 October 1972, a stopping train to Hertford North composed of these two-car units has just left Kings Cross suburban in the evening rush hour. On the left may be seen a typical array of main-line diesel locomotives in use on East Coast express services at this period.





This view taken from the window of one of the carriages of the down *Cambridge Buffet Express* on 10 December 1972 shows the demolition of the ramp to the former Highgate and Alexandra Palace branches, which took the down track, north of Finsbury Park station. The two tracks on the left are the down slow and down goods, which passed beneath the down Highgate track. Note also the semaphore signals still in use.



For several weeks in the spring of 1973, the Hertford Loop was closed to traffic while Ponsbourne Tunnel, north of Cuffley, was enlarged to accommodate overhead 25kV wiring for the forthcoming Great Northern suburban electrification scheme. London Country Bus Services Ltd provided a rail replacement service between Cuffley and Hertford North, using elderly ex-London Transport RT buses. Here on 11 March 1973, RT4550 awaits departure from Cuffley station for Hertford as an early Derby-built three-car DMU sets off for London. Note the early BR station sign on the left.



On the afternoon on Monday, 4 June 1973, Brush Type 2 (later Class 31) diesel, No 5592 hauls a rake of seven 1950s BR standard suburban carriages from Ferme Park sidings across the Great Northern main line just north of what was then called Harringay West station to take up service in the evening rush hour. The locomotive was one of those built in 1959/60 to replace N2 and L1 class tank engines on GN suburban duties; the carriages were of especially short length to negotiate the sharp Hotel Curve used by down suburban trains on the City widened lines from Moorgate to Kings Cross. Note also the large number of semaphore signals still in use.



On 28 July 1973, driving motor E51268 is at the trailing end of a formation of two Cravens two-car DMU units seen on an up local service at Welwyn Garden City. This particular car had been new to such services replacing steam in the late 1950s. Before too long, the footbridge here and at other stations along the line would be replaced as a result of overhead electrification. Welwyn Garden City would become the northern terminus for inner suburban GN electrics on the main line, as it still is today.





The previous photograph was taken from the window of one of the cars of this Cravens two-car unit, composed of driving trailer E56431 (leading) and driving motor E51301, heading for Baldock which was then usually the northern terminus for stopping services from Kings Cross. Again, both cars were new to these services, when for me, as a youngster of twelve or so, it was a great novelty to be able to sit behind the driver on journeys to and from Stevenage, where the train has just arrived here on 28 July 1973. The new Stevenage station, adjacent to the centre of the new town, has finally opened after many years of pressure from local residents. Note how it is still unfinished, with building materials on the platform – something that would never be tolerated by today's 'Health & Safety Gestapo'!

My train homewards that evening was the up *Cambridge Buffet Express*, hauled by Brush Type 2 diesel, No 5677. This was again a locomotive that had been new to these services. Note the planks of wood on the right – ideal 'ammunition' for vandals to place on the track and perhaps cause a derailment, although of course since the station was probably fully staffed at this period, the chances of that happening would have been remote.





On one of the platforms of Kings Cross suburban station, this Derby-built DMU formation is led by driving motor E50877. This was my mode of travel for another trip to Stevenage on 28 August 1973, and had been delivered in the mid-1950s for Western Region suburban services in the Birmingham area.



Seen from the same platform as the previous image, No 5614, a Brush Type 2 new to the GN suburban services, stands at the top of the platform which led up from Hotel Curve and the City Widened Lines. This platform had a pronounced slope, which once again would fall foul of Health & Safety regulations today.