

# LINTON AND DISTRICT HISTORY SOCIETY

*Where History Comes To Life*

## THE BIG FOUR

Following the Railways Act of 1921, on the 1st January, 1923 numerous independent railway companies were gathered together into four large companies being the "Great Western", the only company to retain its original name, the "London, Midland and Scottish", the "London and North Eastern" and the "Southern" who became known as the "Big Four". The areas served by these companies were approximately four parts of the British Isles, thus the Southern Railway served the south eastern sector being Kent, Surrey, Sussex, Hampshire, Dorset, and Wiltshire; whilst the "Great Western" that part to the west namely Buckinghamshire, Berkshire, Oxfordshire, Gloucestershire, Warwickshire, Wiltshire, Worcestershire, Herefordshire and Wales. The division was not however strictly on a county basis, but tended to follow the territory covered by the former railway companies.

Examples of the grouping are that the "Great Western" absorbed the "Cambrian Railways", "Taff Vale Railway", "Barry Railway", "Rhymney Railway", "Cardiff Railway", "Alexandra (Newport and South Wales) Docks and Railway" plus obviously the "Great Western" original company. Of these companies the original "Great Western" had the greatest length of line being 3,005 miles, whilst "Cambrian Railways" had 295 miles of permanent way. The amalgamation also included the ships and docks of the former companies which were extensive from the pleasure steamers of the "Caledonian", the "London & South Western" and the "London, Brighton and South Coast", to cross channel ferries of the "Great Eastern" and transatlantic liners of the "London & North Western" to mention just a few.

There were also various joint companies which included amongst others the "Cheshire Lines Committee" and the "Midland and Great Northern Joint", these had been operated by two or more railway companies as a joint venture, often for over 60 years, and these were mostly divided between two or more of the "Big Four" according to their geographical locations. In some instances parts of these joint operations were only partly absorbed by one or more of the "Big Four", thus the "Metropolitan and Great Central Joint Committee" was split between the "Metropolitan" and the "LNER" or "London & North Eastern".

There was an element of jealousy that God's Wonderful Railway (GWR) had been able to retain its original name, whilst the LNER was blamed for trying to resurrect the glory days of the L&NWR (London & North Western Railway, originally the "London & Birmingham Railway" one of the first). Similar to the wits who dubbed the "Manchester, Sheffield & Lincolnshire Railway" (later to become the "Great Central", and then part



*LNER Silver Jubilee on the East Coast Main Line south of Hatfield in 1935.*



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of the LMS) Money Sunk and Lost, so in the 1930's the LNER was known as the Late and Never Early Railway.

Not all railways were included in the 1921 legislation, for example the "London Electric Railway", the "District Railway" and the "City and South London Railway" in London, the "Mersey Railway" and the "Liverpool Overhead Railway" in the Liverpool area, and various smaller railways including the "Bishops Castle Railway" in Shropshire, the "Shropshire & Montgomeryshire Railway" and the "Ffestiniog Railway" to name just a few.

Even before the "grouping" of companies into the "Big Four" the heavier and more powerful "Pacific" locomotives were replacing the "Atlantic" for fast passenger services, and there had been "named" trains,

for example the "Great Northern" "Hertford Flyer" and from 1862 the "Flying Scotsman" on the East Coast route whilst the "Great Western" operated the "Flying Dutchman" between Paddington and St. David's, Exeter from 1849, and the "Cornish Riviera Express" from 1904. The "LNER" Flying Scotsman hauled by A1 Pacific No. 4472 and also named "Flying Scotsman" and displayed at the British Empire Exhibition of 1924 and 1925 established the first nonstop run from Kings Cross (London) to Waverley (Edinburgh) on 1st May, 1928.



*LMS Coronation Scott in 1937 .*

After the years of the Great Depression the Silver Jubilee of 1935 was celebrated by the "LNER" with a train named "Silver Jubilee" painted entirely silver she was hauled by an A4 Pacific and consisted of seven coaches whilst the Coronation of 1937 gave rise to the "LMS" "Coronation Scott" named train.

This era saw the birth of streamlined locomotives in tune with the glamour of speed so typical of the 1930's, and on the 15th May, 1929 the "Southern Railway's" Golden Arrow service enabled passengers to leave Victoria Station (London) and arrive at the Gare du Nord (Paris) the same



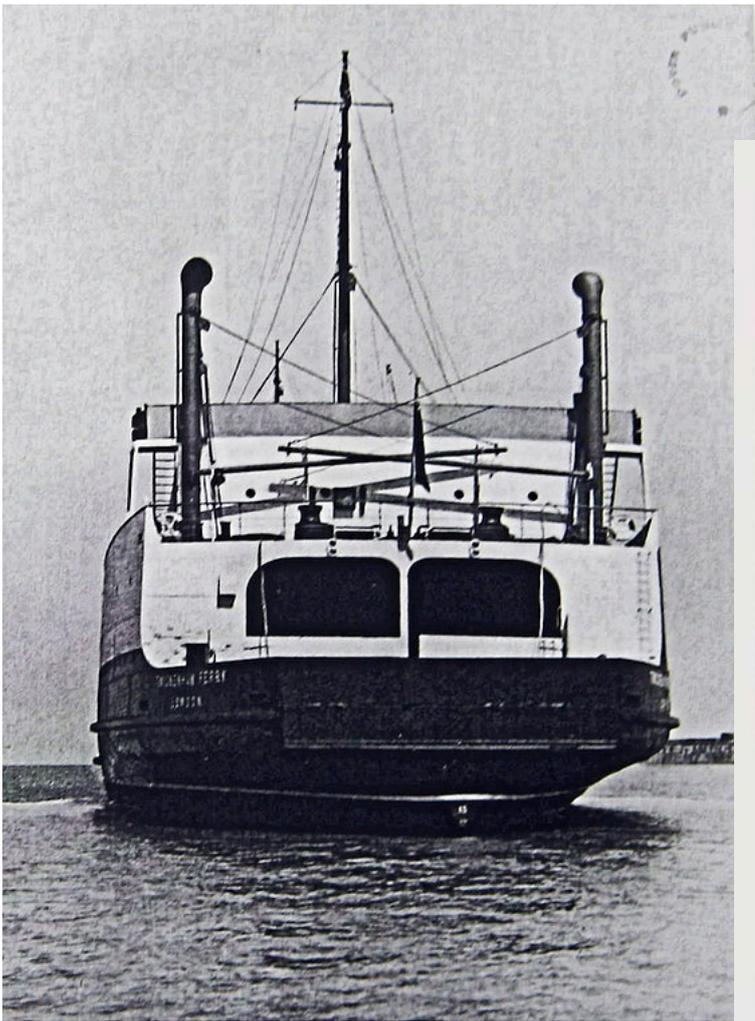
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day. However, and also operated jointly with the “Chemins de Fer du Nord” an overnight service commenced on the 5th October, 1936 employing specially constructed train ferries where passengers could go to sleep in London and wake up in Paris the following morning.

This arrangement remained intact until the “Big Four” were nationalised in 1948 to become “British Railways”.



*Southern Railway train ferry MV Twickenham in 1934 showing the two portals where railway carriages were shunted into the ship. LMS Coronation Scott in 1937 .*

THE  
**NIGHT FERRY**  
THROUGH SLEEPING CARS  
NIGHTLY IN EACH DIRECTION

dep 9 0* pm	<b>LONDON</b> (VICTORIA)	arr 9 10 am
arr 9 0 am	<b>PARIS</b> (NORD)	dep 9 45 pm

BRITISH RAILWAYS

*BR poster of 1953 for the Night Train Ferry*

Article by Dorian Osborne. Reprinted from The Chimes OnLine - <https://www.thechimes.org.uk/historical-blog>

