

Tom Marshall's Weekly News, November 9, 2015

Steam Passenger Trains in the British Isles, 1951: The *Weekly News* of July 11, 2011, told of my first trip to the U. K. in 1951. Most U.S. railroads had abandoned steam locomotives on passenger trains by that time, but Britain's trains remained almost 100% steam-powered. For me, that was a tremendous bonus for what was otherwise an interesting business trip.

My business in London in 1951 was centered around Friends House on Euston Road. A block away was the busy Euston Station, one of about eight such stations serving the large metropolis. While I did not take a train from Euston, I was in the station several times, especially during the busy late afternoon commuter traffic. Soft coal smoke with its rich aroma was everywhere, and local trains serving cities and towns to the north of London were leaving continuously from the several passenger platforms. Great little paperback railroad books showing steam passenger trains at high speed could be bought for less than a dollar (U.S.) at the news stand in Euston Station.

I had business in Southampton and also in Oxford. I rode a train from Waterloo Station to Southampton, stayed at the Polygon Hotel there, then took a cross-country route to Oxford, changing at Reading, and finally back to London, arriving at Paddington Station. All segments of this trip were steam-powered, of course. Back in London, I visited the Festival of Britain, where, a feature of the transportation exhibit was one of the latest British Railways' Pacific-type (4-6-2) passenger locomotives, all spit-and-polish. The English loved their steam engines.

After a journey north in a rental car, about a week later I was in York, 188 miles from London's King's Cross Station and took the train from there to Edinburgh, 205 miles, along the scenic North Sea coast. Waiting on one of the many parallel platforms for the northbound train from London, I soon saw a streamlined Pacific with about 12 cars in tow drift into the station right on time. My coach was about halfway back in the train, and the scenery for most of the trip was superb. Traveling over the former London & Northeastern Railway's main line (route of the Royal Scotsman), a passenger could view three sides of the huge Durham Cathedral as the train rounded a horseshoe curve and get many scenic views along the low cliffs that lined the North Sea. Like during World War II on the New Haven Railroad's Coast Line from New Haven to Westerly on the New York-to-Boston run, the large fast-turning drive wheels with their side rods could often be seen from the windows of the coaches behind. A brief pause at the busy junction of Newcastle-on-Tyne was the only stop on this 200-mile journey, and the 120 miles from there to Edinburgh was run off in two hours flat. This was steam railroading at its best!

The longest cantilever bridge in the world at that time was the Firth-of-Forth railway bridge a few miles outside Edinburgh, built in 1890 and christened by Edward, Prince of Wales (later King Edward VII). One of the Sherlock Holmes stories involved an adventure on this bridge. I went by bus and ferry to Dunfermline on the north side of the bridge and rode a southbound train across the famous structure, pulled by a blue, oddly-streamlined 10-wheeler (4-6-0). Finally, I took the train from Edinburgh to Glasgow in preparation for my trip home from Prestwick Airport. A portly Scottish woman, with whom I shared a compartment along with others, thought I looked hungry, so she offered me a homemade crumpet from her knap-sack. It was quite good.