

Platform 2 at Euston in LNWR days with Compound *Flying Fox* on the arrival platform, the overhead signalbox on the left and the fireman standing on the track. LNWR SOCIETY



Crewe Works in 1927, with a 0-6-0 coal engine, a Precursor behind it and others nearby being worked on. LNWR SOCIETY



Euston station frontage on 26 July 1888 with the 1862 London and Birmingham Railway Doric arch and LNWR gate houses (which still remain) with admin building on the left and booking office beyond arch. Bits of the Doric arch are now being retrieved from the Prescott channel in East London to allow barges to use the canal lock to transport materials to the Olympic games site. LNWR SOCIETY

Now, let's build a Bowen Cooke LNWR express locomotive!

A completely new LNER Peppercorn A1 Pacific, *Tornado* has been built; a GWR Saint is being reconstructed from a Hall; an LMS 'Baby Scot' and an LBSCR Atlantic are under way; several Ffestiniog Railway Fairlie 0-4-4-0T replicas have been constructed. Recently announced projects include a BR Clan Pacific, a beautiful NER Atlantic, a G5 0-4-4T, a BR 3MT 2-6-2T, an LNER B17 4-6-0 and a GER F5 2-4-2T.

It's time to build a George the Fifth, Prince of Wales or Sir Gilbert Claughton. That colour photo of LNWR-restored one-sixth scale model *Orion* in shiny lined black LNWR livery (*Heritage Railway* issue 125) showed just how beautiful a full-sized Bowen Cooke replica could look. It was inspiring!

It's a business proposition now. Furthermore, brand-new heritage locomotives are becoming a better business proposition for heritage railways than trying to keep old ones going at vast expense. This presents a possibility not considered before – the possibility of one or two brand-new Bowen Cooke locomotives – a simple parallel boiler George and a relatively simple Claughton.

Charles Bowen Cooke was one of the great early 20th century locomotive engineers. Yet not one of his express locomotives has survived into preservation. Surely, the time has come to put this right. The LNWR was the largest pre-grouping railway and for all their faults, his locomotives were the backbone of this great railway's express services from 1910 until the middle to late 20s.

Virgin's Pendolinos have transformed rail travel on the West Coast route. London Midland's new Desiros will do the same for intermediate services from Euston, starting in the New Year.

A hundred years ago, the West Coast route was operated by the prestigious London and North Western Railway, the 'Premier Line' as it was called, and north of Carlisle, by the Caledonian Railway. About 100 years ago another transformation of West Coast railway travel was beginning. The LNWR was about to begin a programme of new locomotive and carriage building that would transform motive power and passenger carriages on this route from Victorian to early 20th century standards. It began in 1904 under the auspices of chief locomotive engineer, George Whale, and continued under Charles Bowen Cooke who took over in 1909, until he died in 1920.

The LNWR was arguably the largest of Britain's great pre-Grouping railways. The term, the 'Premier Line', used in its advertising, originated during the 1860s when financial journalists referred to LNWR shares as a premier investment, a sort of bluest of blue chips. You only have to look at its system map to see that it served almost all the major centres of industry in the country.

No 20th century London & North Western Railway express locomotive has survived? Bruce Nixon questions whether he is the only railway enthusiast who deplors this fact and says surely the time has come to put this right.

By the time it became the largest constituent of the newly formed London Midland & Scottish Railway in 1923 it was the largest joint stock company in the UK.

The accompanying photographs – supplied by the LNWR Society – show just what a brilliant enterprise the LNWR was in its day. The LNWR symbolised something important that we as a nation seem to have lost: vision, obsession with quality, cleanliness and punctuality, dedicated employees, cost consciousness and commercial success. It was a great railway: magnificent, inspired and proudly aware of itself. The splendid classical station at Euston, was entered through a magnificent Doric Arch. In the Great Hall, with its double curving staircase reminiscent of a country house, stood the statue of Robert Stephenson, now outside the station front.

The elegant platform canopies supported by ornate cast iron pillars, classical hotel and offices were demolished in the 1960s modernisation. Part of what are believed to be the remains of the Doric Arch, demolished in 1962, are being retrieved from the Prescott channel in east London to allow barges to transport materials to the Olympic Games site according to *Rail Magazine* 3-16 June.

Crewe, where the LNWR built and maintained its huge fleet of locomotives, was one of the great railway works. According to an article in *The Railway Magazine* about 1911, Crewe Works was the 'greatest railway works in the world'. It produced more locomotives than any other as well as many other things for the railway – rails, steelwork for bridges, timber structures for stations, signalboxes, gangers' huts, soap etc. Later, it played a major part in WWI munitions production and it became the main works of the LMS. Beautiful carriages, many with six-wheel bogies, painted in a superb 'plum and spilt milk' livery, lined out in gold were hauled by elegant black locomotives.

Francis William Webb, a great, innovative Victorian locomotive engineer, was a major exponent of compounding as a means of reducing costs. Trouble



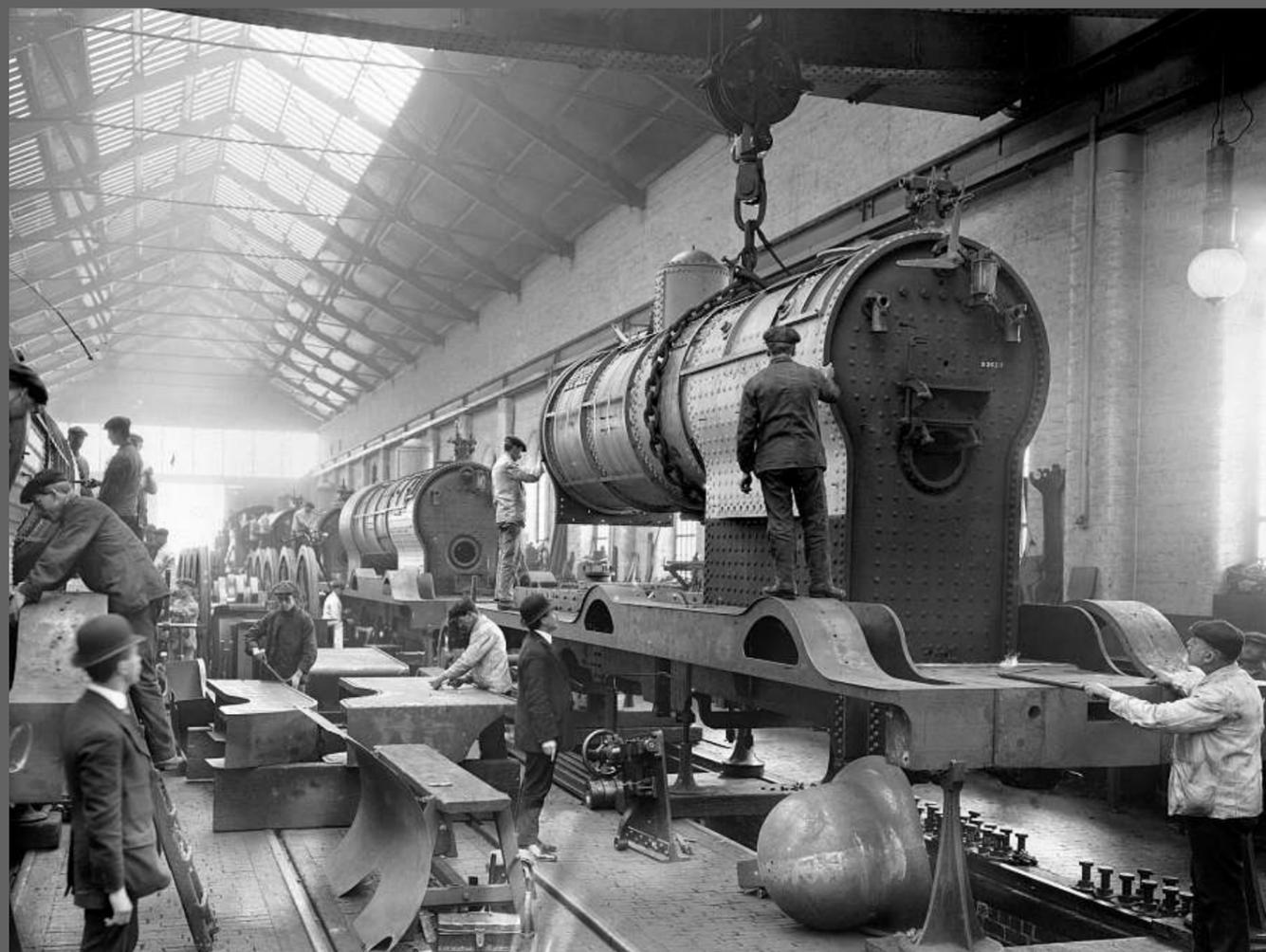
The Great Hall interior on 10 September 1890 with George Stephenson's statue – now outside the station – and the door of shareholders' room up the stairs. LNWR SOCIETY



Cloughton 4-6-0 *Sir Frank Ree* on Camden Bank with a down Liverpool and Manchester express climbing out of Euston with the still-existing tall terraces behind. LNWR SOCIETY



Crewe North Shed, 1910, from Spider Bridge. Precursor, Experiments, Precedents, and Coal Engines in the yard. LNWR SOCIETY



The erecting shed at Crewe during a Royal Visit of HM George the Fifth in 1913; a George the Fifth 4-4-0's boiler being erected on the locomotive's frames, a dome in the foreground right and a bowler-hatted official in the foreground left. LNWR SOCIETY



An official photograph from around 1914 of George the Fifth 4-4-0 *Wolfhound*, at Crewe North. LNWR SOCIETY

was his impressive-looking express locomotives, with tall chimneys and large rounded domes, liveried in highly polished 'blackberry black', lined out in scarlet, cream and grey, were now obsolete – a livery later adopted by BR.

His Victorian fleet of locomotives included small 'Jumbo' 2-4-0 engines and, dating from the 1890s, imposing compound 4-4-0 and 2-2-2-2 locomotives. With the exception of the amazing Teutonic and Dreadnoughts most of these were unreliable and sluggish and had to be coupled together in pairs to haul increasingly heavy and well equipped trains on the West Coast route. In the late 19th century the loadings of express passenger trains increased by the provision of better train heating (steam instead of individual warmers, so an extra drain on boilers), electric light (driven by dynamo – more work for the locomotive), dining cars, tea cars, corridor stock (more weight per passenger), and so on.

So bigger engines were needed to pull them. By the turn of the century, these locomotives and rolling stock were hopelessly antiquated.

New locomotives. In 1904, the LNWR embarked upon a massive programme of locomotive and carriage building that was to transform this

railway and bring it into the 20th century. The newly appointed chief mechanical engineer, George Whale, began a whole new generation of locomotives. Civil engineers placed limitations on locomotive axle loads and their fears of the hammer blow effects on the tracks from powerful locomotives had to be taken into account. His handsome Precursor, a relatively simple, compact but powerful 4-4-0, basically a much enlarged 'Jumbo', was the first of a succession of locomotives that would be streets ahead of its predecessors.

The 1904 Precursor, compared with Webb's Victorian engines, was virtually the equivalent of Virgin's new Pendolino. A year later, he introduced a bigger, less successful, 4-6-0 Experiment class. With much larger boilers and short chimneys and domes, these Edwardian locomotives looked completely different from their Victorian predecessors.

Then in 1910 and 1911 respectively, the brilliant Charles John Bowen Cooke, following Continental European and US practice, superheated these locomotives and modernised their front ends, calling them the George the Fifth and Prince of Wales classes and built many more. British locomotive

engineers at that time were keenly interested in the latest steam engine technology from Germany, France and America. The George the Fifth was perhaps the most successful 4-4-0 of its time — an amazing and beautiful little locomotive with huge power for its size. It was more than 25 per cent more powerful than the similarly sized Precursor.

Outstanding performers, for power output in relation to size and cost, they were one of the most successful designs of their day (see OS Nock's superb books, *The Precursor Family* and *The LNWR locomotives of CJ Bowen Cooke* and Tuplin's *North Western Steam* for data). On this basis, the 'Georges' were the equal of the best GWR Churchward engines and certainly cost far less to build.

In 1913, Bowen Cooke introduced a handsome, modern four-cylinder 4-6-0, the Sir Gilbert Claughton class. The design was compromised by the limitations of the LNWR track, so the boiler was reduced in size from the original design and to reduce the hammer blow effect on track, all four cylinders drove on the leading axle and so were perfectly balanced. A not entirely successful design, it underwent a succession of improvements under the LMS.

These LNWR locomotives possessed a simple beauty — illustrated by the accompanying photographs. Their names, among the finest in railway history, inspired my imagination. For example, *Sirocco*, *Lord Loch*, *Ptarmigan*, *Snipe*, *Wild Duck*, *India*, *Queen of the Belgians*, *Lusitania*, *Princess Louise*.

The compact and elegant 4-4-0s continued to haul West Coast passenger traffic into the late 1920s. LNWR express locomotives were gradually superseded by Sir Henry Fowler's large-boilered Claughtons, Patriots and Royal Scots. Then, in the mid 30s, Sir William Stanier introduced modern taper-boilered Pacifics and 4-6-0s based on GWR designs. Now hopelessly obsolete and relegated to secondary duties, for a while, surviving 4-4-0 Precursor and George the Fifth locomotives headed fast trains from Euston to Watford, Berkhamsted, Tring and Bletchley. Part of the reason why few lasted beyond the 30s was that they could be flogged so hard, they wore out. Also, LNWR locomotives were not favoured under the regime of Midland Railway traditions that dominated the first years of the LMS.

The last Precursor. By 1949, when I was a schoolboy, only one 4-4-0 survived. Funnily enough, it was one of the original Precursors, built in 1905, modernised several times in its life and now relegated to the Denbigh to Chester branch line. Like most of its sister engines, it had a wonderful name: *Sirocco*.

I was fascinated by their unique appearance, with their beautiful curvaceous splashers for driving wheels and coupling rods, lovely engraved brass nameplates, circular wheel bosses, distinctive cabs with rectangular rear splashers incorporated into their sides, neat coal tenders, round smokebox door handles and three-part chimney castings. They looked altogether too

elegant for humble duties. See all this in my picture. Their exhaust beat made an urgent, rushing sound and they had haunting high-pitched whistles.

Somehow I felt inspired by these surviving Edwardian railway engines. With my cheap little pre-war camera, I took this atmospheric picture of the last surviving West Coast Edwardian passenger engine in Chester station in 1949, a few months before it was withdrawn. It had just arrived from Denbigh. Apart from Chester station, I dragged my poor long-suffering father to Edge Hill locomotive depot where there were representatives of almost every LNWR class, from Webb's tanks to *Sirocco* and the last Claughton. At the age of about 15, I managed to persuade the shed superintendent to haul out six locomotives from inside the shed at the back of which was the last Claughton, No 6004, ex *Princess Louise*, then relegated to a goods duty but still, beneath the grime, in LMS maroon. I snapped that one too.

Just before it was cut up, *Sirocco*, the last Prince of Wales and Claughton No 6004 were lined up for a photograph at Crewe Works, where they were built, in the hope that they would be saved. But BR cut them up instead of preserving them as a tribute to those two ingenious and determined engineers who surmounted all the obstacles and revolutionised travel on the West Coast route of the day. Luckily, thanks to the Bangor shedmaster's foresight in hiding the last Webb 0-6-2 Coal Tank, it did not suffer the same fate!

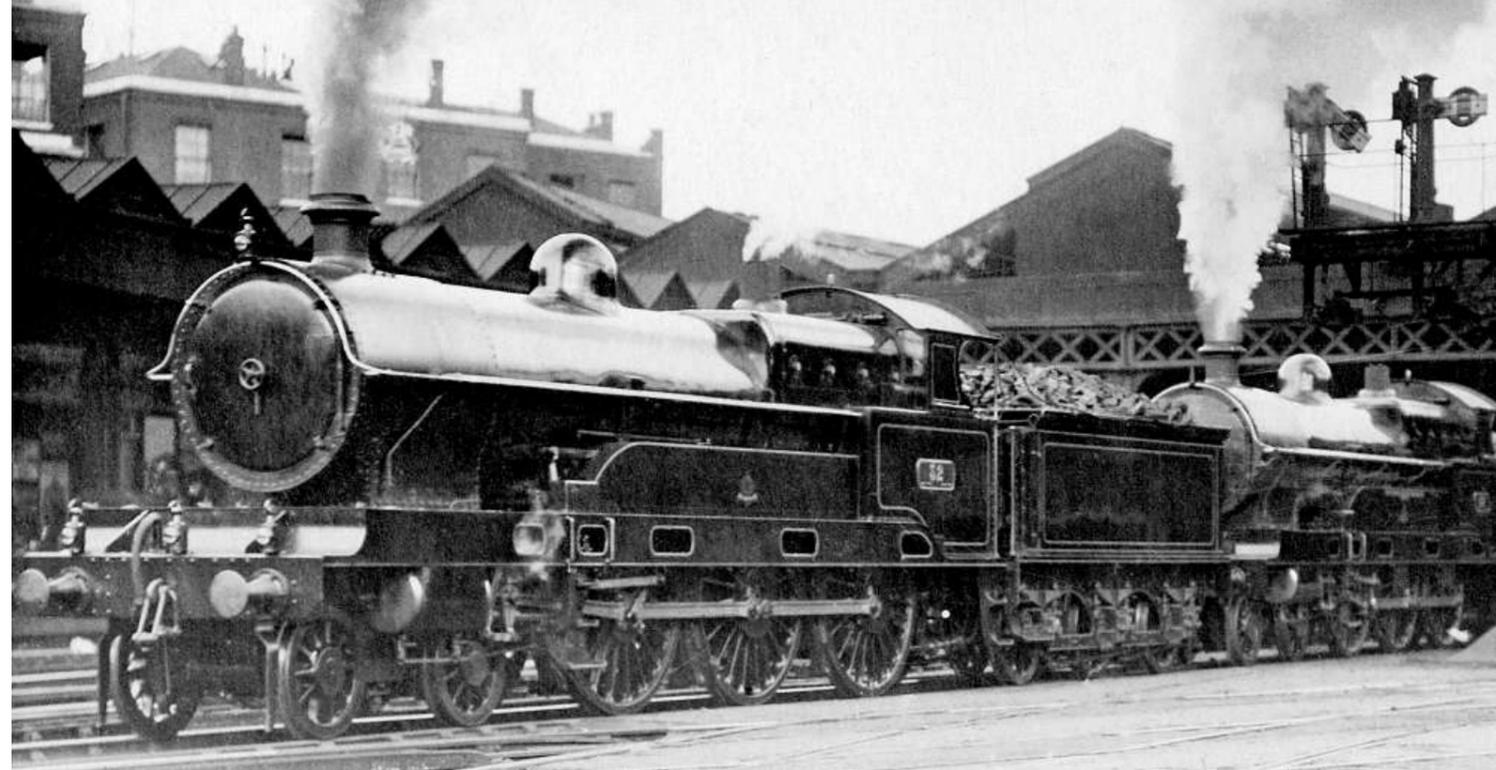
A big gap in our railway heritage. There is no surviving 20th-century locomotive representing the prestigious LNWR's West Coast 'Premier Line'. Its great classical terminus, Euston station, apart from two gate houses is also gone, despite Sir John Betjeman's efforts. Nothing remains of the work of Whale and Bowen Cooke, except one of the huge class of 0-8-0 goods locomotives, reconstructed from old Webb compounds that continued to provide heavy goods power well into BR days. (Whale converted Webb's 0-8-0 compound goods locomotives to simple expansion; Bowen Cooke and his successor Beames, superheated the design and built many more new ones. More than 550 passed into BR ownership in 1948.)

For all their faults, Whale and Bowen Cooke express locomotives were fine engines and a huge step ahead of the Victorian Webb locomotives that preceded them. Many less beautiful and successful engines of the period, have survived in preservation — but not one example of a 20th century LNWR express engine. This is a major gap in railway preservation.

The GWR is well represented, and deservedly so. So are other pre-grouping railways: Midland, Great Central, Great Northern, LSWR, LBSCR and SECR. The LNWR contributed a third of LMS locomotives in 1923 and its stock was larger than the whole of the Southern Railway.

This can be changed! The Precursor, an amazing little locomotive, was the start of all the subsequent Whale and Bowen Cooke development. It illustrates

Two un-superheated Precursor 4-4-0s, *Eglington* piloting *Arab*, double-heading the 2pm 'Corridor' express out of Euston. LNWR SOCIETY



A double-headed Royal Train on 16 August 1923, emerging from Euston with Claughton 4-6-0 No 32 piloting *Princess Louise*, the last Claughton to survive, as nameless No 6004 on goods service until 1949 by then still in crimson livery and with a big boiler. LNWR SOCIETY

the inside-cylinder 4-4-0 or 4-6-0 of which the LNWR was the biggest exponent. A superheated *Sirocco*, basically a George the Fifth, could represent a most successful design and be the cheapest to build. A Claughton would be magnificent.

'New build' steam is becoming the way ahead for heritage railways, in that it is recognised that it is cheaper to build new, rather than keep old worn-out locomotives in working order at enormous cost. Parallel boiler locos are also far cheaper to build.

Hence the proposed project could be a financial winner for the right heritage line wanting a new locomotive to replace one that is costing too much to maintain. This makes the idea of two, or at least one, Bowen Cooke locomotives a pragmatic and practical proposition. Could be another opportunity for Great Northern Steam at Darlington and a Teeside foundry?

What about a Claughton and a 'George', both of which would be as up to the job of main line steam as they were 85 years ago in the early 1920s?

Who is out there, with the visionary leadership, entrepreneurial, technical and fund-raising skills, crazy enough to have a passion to build a replica of, say, *Sirocco*, *Coronation* or *Sir Gilbert Claughton* or *Patriot*?

It needs a few people with passion, energy, determination, time, organisational skills and a crazy obsession to mount a campaign to build a replica. How exciting it would be to see and hear one of these beautiful, classic Georgian or Edwardian engines steaming again. A *Sirocco* could easily be converted in a few hours to a George the Fifth, just by changing over the driving wheel splashers and its name and number. That is two locomotives for one! Imagine it hauling a rake of magnificent LNWR 'plum and spilt milk' twelve-wheel carriages (they still exist) into Euston to celebrate the continuing development of the 'Premier Line'. And imagine a Claughton and a 'George' passing one another, somewhere else on the West Coast Main Line.

If you qualify, get in touch with me, Bruce Nixon at brucenixon@waitrose.com; my website is www.brucenixon.com

I am an author, writer and speaker mostly on sustainability. Railways are one of my indulgences as well as one of the most sustainable and enjoyable forms of transport.

With thanks to the LNWR Society <http://www.lnwr.org.uk/index.php> <http://www.lnwr.org.uk/contacts.php> for the magnificent photographs apart from one of my own.



The last working LNWR 4-4-0, No 25297 *Sirocco* stands at Chester General station in 1949. BRUCE NIXON