

MY FIRST JOB AT THE ANDOVER JUNCTION SHED

My name is Tony Mason and I was born in Whitchurch, Hampshire in 1941. As a teenager my main interest was train spotting and I traveled all over the Southern region of British Railways collecting steam locomotive numbers. This was the age of steam and there was something about steam locomotives that attracted my interest to the point that my one ambition was to become an engine driver.

So passionate was my interest that I decided to leave school at 15 and take my first job with British Railways as an engine cleaner at the Andover Junction locomotive shed. My decision was influenced to some degree by the fact that another friend from Whitchurch, who was a year older than me, was already an engine cleaner at the Basingstoke shed.



Very early photo of Andover Junction shed at a time when there were in fact two sheds, one for the MSWJR and the other for the SWR. When the regions were amalgamated in 1948 the two sheds were combined into one. At some point the shed on the right of the photo was demolished because in 1956 when I worked there only the engine shed on the left of the photo remained. Picture courtesy of your website

In 1956 Andover was a small shed with a Shed Foreman, 5 Drivers, 5 Fireman and 2 Cleaners.

I remember the following:

Mr. Wigmore, the Shed Foreman who was also a Justice of the Peace in Andover.

Jim Metcalfe, the senior driver who deputized for Mr. Wigmore when he was away on court duties.

xxx Metcalfe, Jim's son who was a passed fireman when I joined but who transferred as a driver in the Brighton area in 1956.

Len Chick, a driver with diabetes who was confined to the shunter at Andover Junction.

Reg Chick (No relation to Len), a driver and his fireman "Curly".

Reg Parker, a driver who took me along on the footplate many times and the driver I have the fondest memories of together with his fireman John.

Jim xxx, a driver who, once known, would never be forgotten. He was recognizable by the fact he always had a brown schoolboy's satchel over his shoulder and across his body in which he kept his lunch. Periodically he would reverse the satchel so that when he opened it he could read his name and address written on the inside of the flap. He never mixed with the other crews in the lunchroom and always boarded a locomotive on the driver's side, even if this meant going down on to the tracks to get to the drivers side. His fireman was named Ian (in picture below).

There was one other crew whose names I cannot remember and a passed firemen, Les Green.



Two photos taken at Andover shed in 1956. The locomotive is sitting where the old shed on the right in the photo in the previous page was located. The remaining shed on the left of the photo above can be seen in the background. The driver and fireman in the other photo are standing alongside the turntable that was on the other side of locomotive. The driver's name was Les Green (passed fireman) and the fireman Ian xxx.



1956 photo of driver Reg Parker and his firemen John waiting to take a local train down to Southampton. The locomotive is a T9.

The Andover shed was originally established as part of the Midland & South Western Junction Railway (MSWJR) that ran from Cheltenham to Andover and connected the Midland Railway at Cheltenham to the South Western Railway (SWR) at Andover. From Andover the South Western Railway continued on to Southampton via Romsey.

I couldn't understand when I joined why some of the drivers were referred to as Western men and others Southern men and it really wasn't until finding your website detailing the history of the line that I fully understood the history prior to amalgamation.

My passion for the job was evident from day one. Because Andover was a small shed my main duty as a cleaner was assisting the firemen in preparing the locomotives before a journey and assisting them in putting them away after a journey. However, this was not enough for me, I wanted to get on the footplate and experience the real thing.

Once a week I attended "day school" at Eastleigh, the parent shed for Andover Junction. At this school the theory of steam was taught and its application to locomotives. At the end of the course I qualified as a fireman after passing a practical test on the footplate of a regular train. This meant that at the age of 15 I was a passed cleaner qualified as a fireman. This was still not good enough for me, I wanted to be on the footplate and several of the drivers were willing to take me along as the fireman and let their own fireman sit in the passenger carriage. Very often I would complete an 8 hour shift as a cleaner and then go as a fireman for another 6 to 8 hours (unpaid) just to get the experience.

On a regular basis I would be sent to the parent shed at Eastleigh when they were short of firemen. However, being such a junior fireman the Shed Foreman at Eastleigh would usually have me assigned to a small shunting locomotive working around the repair works or the carriage works, which was not very interesting. Apart from the locomotives on the Hayling Island branch the locomotive at the carriage works must have been one of oldest still in operation with British Railways at the time.

Imagine my surprise when I arrived at Eastleigh one day to see that I had been scheduled as the fireman on a locomotive that was tasked to travel light engine to the Fawley Refinery and work an oil tanker goods train. Even the driver was a little surprised to learn I was still only 15 years old. However, everything went fine and we got on well. As time progressed I was scheduled as a fireman more often and my passion to work on the footplate was satisfied.

My other fond memory was when I was assigned with Les Green the passed fireman at Andover to bring a banana train from Southampton Docks as far as Andover en route to Cheltenham. We went light engine (Mogul) to Southampton Docks and then non-stop to Andover. The tricky part with such a heavy load was getting up the bank from Andover Town to Andover Junction. As soon as we passed Clatford the distant was clear for Andover Town and and after Len gave her all he could we roared over the Bridge Street level crossing and up the bank. Unknown to me the shunter from Andover Junction had come to the Town station and when we passed through came out behind us in the event we needed an extra push up the bank. As it happened we had enough momentum to get up the bank and then it was a matter of stopping in time when switched over to the Cheltenham platform.



Two photos of the last train to run over the Cheltenham to Andover line taken at Andover Junction in September 1961. This special train was run on a Sunday one day after regular service ceased. My premonition in 1957 that the line would soon close proved to be correct. The line from Andover Junction to Southampton was closed in 1964. Pictures courtesy of your website.

My first job at Andover Junction was an experience that I will never forget, from the shed foreman to the drivers and firemen they were some of the finest people I have ever worked with and who installed in me a work ethic that prepared me well for future jobs.

However, all good things must come to an end. Starting in 1957 plans introduced by the UK Government proposed to drastically cut the railway system and introduce electrification. This was the first signal that the age of steam was coming to an end and that I would never get to drive a steam locomotive. It was time to move on. So after a little less than 2 years my career on the railways came to an end when I joined the Merchant Navy. I served on only one ship the "Queen of Bermuda" until I was 18 at which time I enlisted in the Royal Marines for 9 years reaching the rank of Sergeant in the Signals Branch. Upon discharge I pursued a career in the area of electronic marine navigation systems with the Decca Navigator Company and continued in this field after emigrating to Canada in 1977 and becoming part owner of a small company. I retired in 2009 and live in Ottawa.

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