

GWR – DIDCOT BY NIGHT

Mike Heath

The Great Western Railway was created by an Act of Parliament in 1835 which authorised construction of a railway linking Bristol with London. 2010 therefore sees the railway's 175th anniversary. The line was designed and engineered by Isambard Kingdom Brunel to be the finest in the land, and was completed in 1841.

Since 1967 Didcot, the half way point of the route, has been home to the Great Western Society who have recreated a living museum upholding the traditions of the Great Western Railway based around the original engine shed, coal stage and depot. On steam days the whole centre comes to life and whereas many preserved railways' steam sheds are 'out of bounds' to the general public the buildings at Didcot are the focal point.

For many years the centre's events calendar included 'Photographers' Evenings' that aimed to recreate some of the activities which were once common in a steam locomotive depot at night but rarely seen. The programme of events provided a variety of opportunities for photography with static scenes alongside locomotives in steam being repositioned around the site throughout the evening.

In this unique album photographer Mike Heath presents a collection of more than 140 images from his stunning portfolio of atmospheric night time scenes taken over a number of years at these events and depicting the real steam atmosphere generated by the only surviving original Great Western engine shed at work.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

For well over 25 years Mike Heath has enjoyed combining his hobbies of photography and visiting preserved railways all over Britain. In that time he has amassed a vast collection of stunning photographs covering all aspects of the railways across all four seasons, day and night. He is the author of more than ten railway titles, all for Halsgrove.

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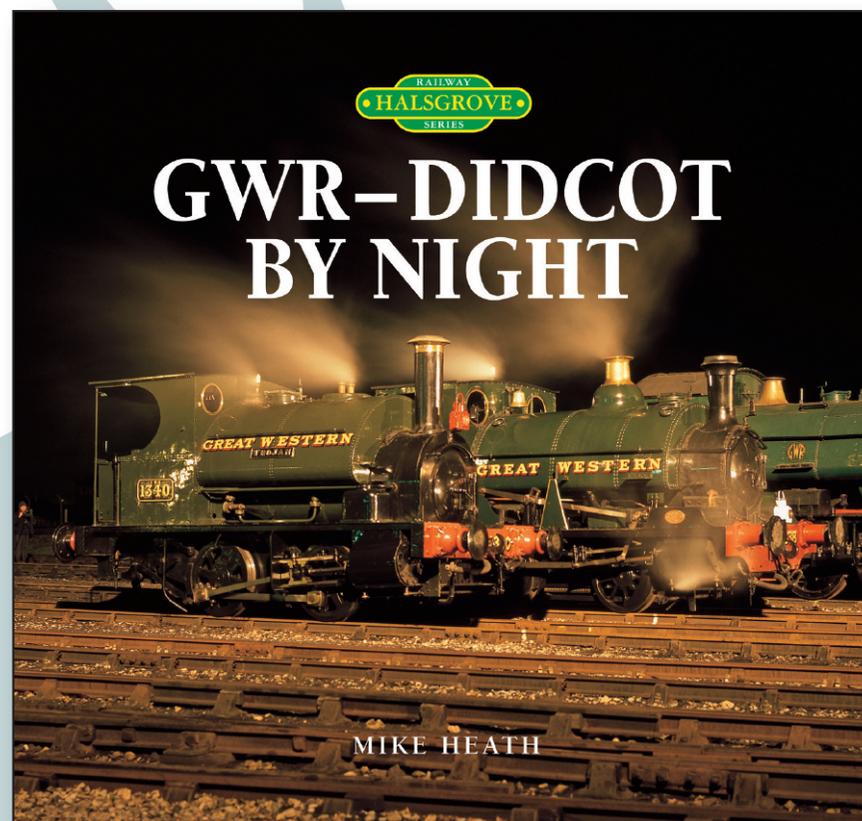
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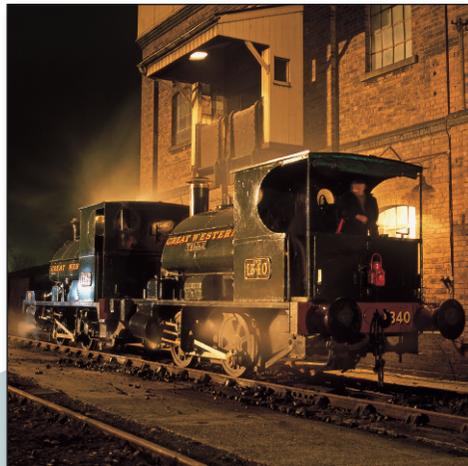
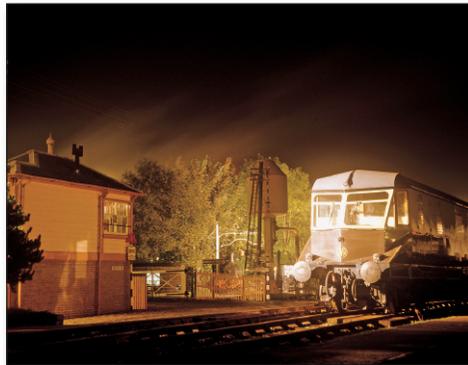
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Above: Frome Mineral Junction signal box, which dates from 1875. It was relocated from Somerset in 1983 and fully restored to its original working condition.

Top right: Didcot's diesel railcar No.22 was built at Swindon in 1940. Again careful positioning creating an evocative image.

Right: The Kings, Halls and Manors of the GWR attract most enthusiasts' attention.



The line ups in front of the shed were a superb spectacle.



Each year all available locomotives were drawn out of the sheds to join those that had been stored for the evening. (Photo: Karl F. Kelly)

Open: Whilst the floodlighting was always set up to highlight the traditional front view of the line up, the freedom to wander around allowed all angles to be covered.



Large 'prairie' No. 6106 stands quietly alongside a 'ready for action' pannier No. 3738.

Example of a double-page spread.