

LAST DAYS OF STEAM

WESTERN & SOUTHERN

Tony Butcher

In 1955 the Modernisation Plan had just been issued which showed that steam traction's future was doomed. In the Southern Region many old classes had kept working due to the Second World War and the subsequent austerity period. Now the attractive SR 4-4-0 classes gradually disappeared, hastened by the 1961 electrification of the Kent lines, although the old tank classes lasted somewhat longer. The Western Region had a more balanced engine set of 4-6-0s and tank engines, but was actually to see steam finish earlier by some two and a half years, effectively in 1964 with only remnants surviving into 1965.

Tony Butcher was fascinated by railways from a young age. His first reasonable camera was a Kodak which allowed him to take action shots in 1956. From that he graduated to a square bellows camera with a 500 shutter in 1957 and a 35mm camera in 1961. With this equipment, Tony amassed a priceless collection of images, recording the last, glorious days of steam, especially in the Southern and Western Regions which are the focus of this book.

Chasing Society Steam specials, which were often aimed at using last in class engines, as well as traversing lines and routes either freight-only or about to be totally closed, Tony Butcher's black and white images portray the poetry and the power of these living machines. From 1962 (and particularly from 1964) his colour images add a sometimes startling depth and immediacy to his collection.

Together, these classic examples from Tony Butcher's peerless picture archive, offer a nostalgic yet stunning view of the Indian summer of steam traction between 1956 and 1967, in what are arguably the most interesting Regions in Britain.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Tony Butcher's interest in railways and steam was reawakened at the age of seventeen by a visit of a younger cousin who wanted to go and see steam at Clapham Junction. From then on, throughout his life he has photographed railways in action. Following an Engineering degree and marriage, from mid 1961 onwards with his own car he travelled all over the country in search of steam. This interest has continued to this day. Tony Butcher photographed preserved steam on BR lines in the 1980s, but since the start of the '90s he has concentrated on photographic charters on the preserved railway lines, now well into the fully digital era.

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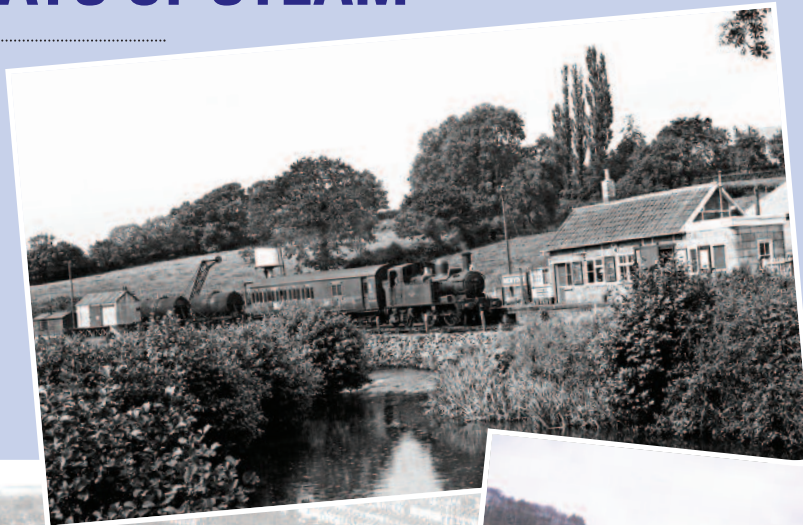
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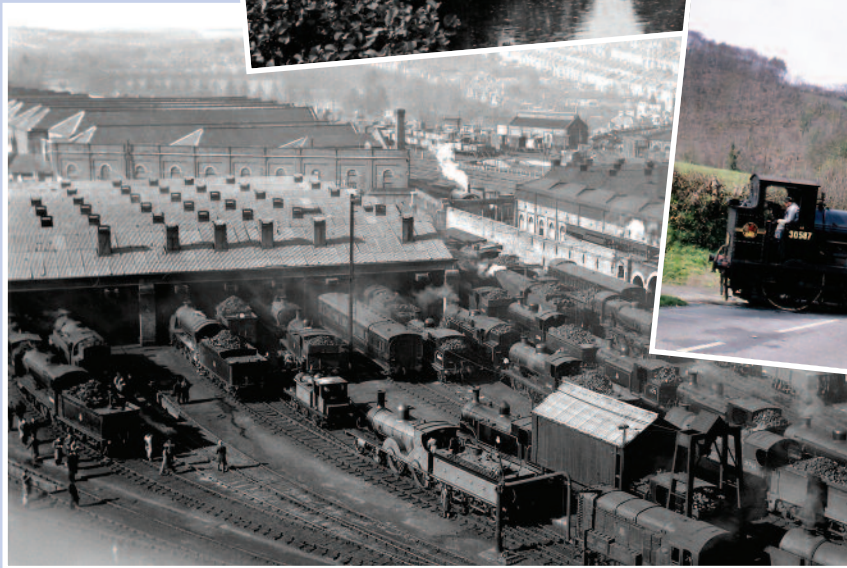
The 1.42 pm from Tiverton arrives at the charming terminus of Hemyock behind 14XX 1471 and its single old Barry coach.



Above: Castle Class, No.7029 "Clun Castle" speeds southwards through Rossett at the foot of Gresford Bank.

Left: Nicely clean Beattie well tank No.30587 crosses the main road at Dunmere Halt with the returning Wenford Bridge Branch – Wadebridge Goods.

Below: Castle No.4096 "Highclere Castle" stands at the buffer stops in Paddington with a train from Cardiff and beyond.



Left: Bird's eye view of Brighton engine shed on a memorable day in April 1958.



Example of a double-page spread.



Small steam locomotive pulling a train through a landscape.



Small steam locomotive pulling a train through a landscape.