

IN CONTROL Part 1

By Maurice G. Boddy

The first control office was at Rotherham Masborough, opened in either 1907 or 1912 (sources differ). Up to then it was left to local men on the ground to sort out problems. The railways had a good telegraph system for communications, and signalmen could communicate with adjacent signal boxes by Morse code on their signalling instruments. Soon Control offices spread around the country. The telegraph system persisted for years to come. Examples of messages being 'wired' were special train movements, no water available in water troughs, train crews required relief en route for long hours or requiring conductors en route for lack of road knowledge.

I started as an assistant controller in Leeds in 1953. Controls differed in practices, as between regions, and between control offices in the same region. Each system had evolved gradually over the years according to local circumstances. At Leeds, there were about ten men on duty during an eight-hour shift. Change over times were nominally 6am, 2pm and 10pm (we were not using the 24-hour system at that time). For staff travelling purposes, the morning change-over was 7am (except Sunday), 1pm (Saturdays only), 9.30pm (every day). The man in charge was the deputy chief controller (DCC). He was the shift deputy to the chief controller and trains clerk, which was a 9 to 5 job. The area covered was large and divided into three smaller areas: North Board, Middle Board and South Board, so called because on the wall were three boards on which had been painted the running lines and sidings. From memory, the running lines were coloured red (main lines), yellow (slow lines), blue (goods lines).

The north board covered Skipton northwards to Ais Gill, with its branch at Garsdale (no-mans land to Hawes). From Settle Junction there was the line to Morecambe and Heysham with its branches at Clapham (no-man's land to Ingletton and then on to Low Gill on the West Coast main line) and at Wennington (no-man's land to Carnforth). There were other branches, at Skipton North Junction towards Colne and at Hellifield towards Blackburn. The middle board covered Leeds (exclusive) to Skipton (exclusive) both via Shipley and via Ilkley. The south board covered Normanton Altofts Junction (exclusive) to Leeds.

There were three train controllers, one for each board. He monitored the progress of all trains in his area, receiving train reports from key signal boxes, many of which had a 'box lad' or train recorder. Peg holes in the board were located on the running lines, and also in sidings, so that the progress of goods trains could be followed. It was not necessary to mark where the passenger trains were, as they usually ran on time and it was easy to remember where they were (or should be). Generally, the only express passenger trains that stopped out of course were northbound on the Settle-Carlisle line, where they sometimes stopped short of steam, or stopped at Blea Moor in either direction for water (especially if Garsdale water troughs were dry). Tickets were made out for each goods train, and these were pegged on the appropriate running line, so that its progress could be seen by all in the control office.

There was also a power controller who liaised with the engine shed foremen, receiving details of which engines were marked up for which train, and also advising the shed foreman of incoming engine numbers. Important information about the condition of an engine was noted and passed on, such as due for 'Boiler Washing Out' (BWO), or (very rarely) due 'Boiler Inspection' (BI). You could not misuse an engine due a BI, as it had to be got back to its home shed as soon as possible. He would liaise with the divisional power controller at Derby (or York from 1957) as necessary, for example receiving instructions to return certain engines light to balance the power situation. For example, ten northbound laden coal trains each with 25 wagons may have been balanced by five southbound empty wagon trains each with 50 wagons. This should have given an imbalance of five engines (and brake-vans) out of work somewhere in the north. Oddly this never happened in real life and, around 1960 for example, men were rostered at Royston shed daily to head south 'on the cushions' to bring back a spare NER engine from some nominated shed. Incidentally if we did have a spare LMR engine, say a Leicester Black Five, York Power Control were quite happy if we sent it light engine to Carlisle, as that was on the LMR.

We were sent road learning whenever there was a slack period, so we could better picture what was happening on the ground, and get to know the signalmen. Ideally the train controllers should all have taken courses on Block Signalling and Rules & Regulations, so they knew what could be done and what not and not give impossible instructions.

Passenger trains used the main and slow lines, and only in emergency the goods lines which were normally operated under 'Permissive Block' regulations instead of 'Absolute Block'. Under 'Permissive Block' several goods trains or light engines could be in one block section and as each one passed the entry signal box the signalman would usually indicate to the driver how far back in the queue he was by sticking up so many fingers. Before a goods line could be changed to 'Absolute Block', all other trains ahead had to be clear of the section.

The difference between slow and fast was somewhat arbitrary and nothing to do with speed. Between Leeds and Shipley during the daytime, the Anglo-Scottish express ran on the slow Lines and all the stopping trains to



Settle and Carlisle steam in the the early sixties. After crossing the viaduct LM Fairbairn 2-6-4T 42173 arrives at Ribbleshead station with a up Carlisle to Leeds local in July 1960. A down train can be seen in the distance crossing the viaduct. Bradshaw for September 1960 shows Ribbleshead served by a curiously imbalanced 'all stations' local service with four southbound and three northbound trains daily some of which originated or terminated at Gardale.

Eric Blakey Collection via David JKelso

Bradford used the fast Lines. This was a relic from when the route was changed from two- to four-track a hundred years ago. The new lines that were added were the slow lines. Trains from the north had the choice at Shipley Leeds Junction of going slow line or fast line. If a passenger train was diverted from its timetabled route, e.g. booked to go slow line but diverted fast line, then it had to be brought "quite or nearly" to a stop, which would impart a couple of minutes delay, so this had to be avoided if possible.

A similar situation applied between Huddersfield and Diggle Junction (in the Manchester control area at that time, but transferred to Leeds in 1957) where the added lines were the slow lines. Over this route expresses always used the slow lines and goods trains always used the fast lines. I have occasionally seen photographs incorrectly captioned as, unless you had seen the entry in the Sectional Appendix, you could not have known which was which. The signalmen did not know either, and the fast lines were only ever referred to as the south lines and the slow lines as the north lines. I visited several signal boxes on this route, including for example Diggle Junction, but never thought to check what was printed on the diagram boards, but presumably just north and south.

Two traffic controllers looked after traffic requirements, train loadings and so on, one for the north board and one for the south board. Details of loadings were telephoned to adjacent control offices as appropriate. The information consisted of train title, engine number, driver's time on duty and noted PL if 'Prepared to Lodge', his route problems, e.g. if requiring a conductor at say Sheffield, he would be shown as Eger Sheffield. Similar details for the guard, though if he required a conductor he would be Alert Sheffield. These telegraph codes Eger and Alert persisted. Sometimes the driver was shown as main lines only to, say, Bedford. These were passenger link men who would not have signed for goods lines and were working back on a goods train. Then would follow the number of wagons. If there was a mix of wagon lengths, e.g. several bogie bolster wagons, the number would be qualified by saying equal to so many in length. This was necessary in case the train had to be shunted into a siding somewhere. On the board was also marked the length capacity of each refuge siding.

There was an interesting working (from memory on Monday mornings), when 24XP, afterwards 1M24, Glasgow-Manchester ran over the Settle-Carlisle line to Hellifield, then over the Lyr to Blackburn. On one

occasion the relief guard at Hellifield was missing and the Carlisle guard said that, for the sake of the passengers, he would work the train forward though he had no road knowledge. The alternative was to terminate the train at Hellifield, at some unearthly hour.

The control boundaries were changed in 1957. Skipton and northwards were transferred to LMR Control. Normanton and south towards Wath Road Junction was taken over from Rotherham control. Leeds to Diggle Junction (exclusive) was acquired from Wakefield and Manchester controls, apart from the short LYR section through Mirfield which remained with Wakefield. Until then the whole of Leeds control area had been an LMR penetrating line for 'Operating and Motive Power' purposes, though in the NER for commercial considerations. Now we were entirely in the NER with new masters at York. There was one obvious change of policy at Normanton where the Midland main Line conflicted with the York-Manchester via Wakefield line. In the past Midland expresses took preference over everything else. In future the night newspaper trains took preference over the Anglo-Scottish expresses. This was the first nail in the coffin for the St. Pancras-Edinburgh/Glasgow expresses, which passed through four regional boundaries at (approximately) Clay Cross, Wath Road Junction, Snaygill and Gretna Junction and had commercial interests in four regions. Rather like the GCR main line, the Midland route to Scotland seemed to have become an embarrassment.

We now dealt with Huddersfield (Hillhouse), Farnley, Royston and Normanton engine sheds, and had lost Skipton and Hellifield. Royston had an early morning workmen's train, to either Monk Bretton (only) or Barnsley, not sure which. One morning the engine developed brake trouble at the last minute, and the train had to be run 'loose-coupled'. It was either that or cancel the train, which would not have gone down well with the passengers. I waited until it had departed before telling the DCC. I don't think we generated any paper work for that incident.

Boundaries changed again in 1960 when we took over the NER lines between Leeds and Micklefield, and Leeds-Arthington, also soon after the western residue of the H&B section. While 'road learning' at Garforth the station master at Kippax instituted me as pilotman over the single-line section between Garforth and Allerton Bywater following failure of the single line telegraph apparatus. This involved 'walking in' the section, bringing back a train from Allerton Bywater to Garforth, then taking another train back to Allerton Bywater. The signal fitter had by then arrived at Allerton Bywater and I watched him solve the problem in one minute. He released the signal lever slightly then slammed it and this cleared the apparatus. The signalman had simply not put the lever back properly. I then had to walk back to Garforth, to restore normal single line working. But at least I had had two footplate trips, on class B16/1, 61429 and J39, 64944.

Although the war had been over for some eight years, engines were still run down and there were frequent failures. Coal quality was a problem and stopping 'short of steam' was a regular occurrence. There were two grades of coal. In Leeds, for example, Holbeck had the Grade 1 passenger coal and Stourton the Grade 2. On the north board prior to 1957 on the night shift there were constant instructions to signalmen to shunt this train or that train from the down Line to the up Line for another train to get past. With a string of trains following one running badly, all those following would gradually run into difficulties as they were not getting a clear road. Trains would be shunted across at Helwith Bridge, Horton or Ribbleshead (but never at Stainforth sidings which was on a curve). An eye was kept on the time, with a view to ensuring the road would be clear for the two down Scottish expresses. And of course not leaving a train stranded on the up Line when the up Scottish expresses were due.

Derailments seemed to be frequent, though rarely serious. They were usually in sidings, though I recall several on the main line which were usually attributable to human error, shared equally between signalling malpractice and drivers missing signals through steam blowing obscuring their view. On one occasion the down overnight St. Pancras-Glasgow ran into the back of the St. Pancras-Edinburgh at Hellifield station. One signal had been at green when it should have been at red, which was put down to the signalman who had left it to his train recorder to remember to put the levers back and another signal was missed due to steam blowing about.

On one occasion at 3.30 in the morning I telephoned the signalman at Keighley Station Junction for train reports to be greeted with "Just a minute, while the dust settles". Followed by "The fully-fitted has run into the back of the passenger train, and the station roof has collapsed". The 12.10am Carlisle-Leicester had just run into the back of the stationary 3.15am Skipton-Bradford local passenger train. The only casualty on the local passenger train was a dog that ran off and was drowned in the nearby river. I had the down St. Pancras-Glasgow express (headed by an A3) stopped at Bingley and instructed the driver to run round his train, take it to Bradford Forster Square, run round again and go forward via Ilkley to Skipton where he could rejoin the main line. That made it the only occasion a Pacific has traversed the section of line from Shipley Guiseley Junction through Baildon to Esholt Junction near Guiseley. Unfortunately it took longer to open the Ilkley route than I had expected (and hoped), so with hindsight I could have got a fresh engine (other than an A3) to Bradford.

At the subsequent inquiry, the Carlisle (Kingmoor) driver explained that during the night you go for miles on green signals so don't bother watching them all the time. He was told "I can't write that down. Shall we start again". The driver then said his vision was being obscured by steam from leaking glands and he had missed one distant signal. "That's better" he was told.

To be continued

IN CONTROL Part 2

By Maurice G. Boddy

I had a footplate trip in September 1953 on the down "Thames-Clyde" non-stop between Leeds and Carlisle. Instead of the usual Holbeck Scot we had a Glasgow (Corkerhill) Jubilee 45711 *Courageous*. The Holbeck coal hopper was out of order and so the engine had been coaled at Stourton. The difference in coal quality was clear. About 18 minutes were lost in the climb from Settle Jct. to Blea Moor, passed at walking pace, and one injector had failed. Afterwards the driver told me if I hadn't have been on the footplate, he would have stopped at Blea Moor for water and raise more steam, but was determined not to admit defeat. He made up some on the run down from Ais Gill, with a top speed of about 83mph. The line speed at that time was 80mph, raised later to 85mph.

In due course the Jubilees and Scots were superseded by A3s, though this was not a happy time for the controller. This engine had vacuum brakes which had a fine tolerance between brake block and wheel tread, and could not be adjusted properly on the poor track in Holbeck shed yard. It was not unusual for the engine brakes to go on and the engine to fail before a train had got very far. Often the A3 missed its return working, and was returned south on another train. This was sometimes on a train which did not call at Leeds station, resulting in A3s heading further south into the Midlands. Leeds Control were never given the running numbers of engines on passenger trains from Carlisle and beyond, which to my mind was a deficiency in the system. Things improved when the A3s were superseded by the steam-braked A1s.

On one Monday morning during the early hours, I sent an A3 light to Sheffield to bring back the Sheffield-Leeds passenger train, which had an odd MO working. A couple of hours later Rotherham Control telephoned to ask me if I was aware they couldn't turn A3s on the small turntable at Sheffield station. I didn't make that mistake again!

A3s were permitted between Leeds and Skipton via Ilkley. This stemmed from an A3 working this route in error a short while before, when a Glasgow-Leeds express had been diverted for engineering reasons. Authority was granted by the Civil Engineer the next day, though there was a proviso that the A3 must not be double-headed. Then one day an express came up with an A3 assisted by a LMS 4-4-0. So this too was authorised the following day, though nothing bigger than a 4-4-0 was permitted.

The sort of emergencies handled included late running of passenger trains, necessitating the running of special trains, or the ordering of taxis. Sheds had spare men, or if not then you could always cancel a freight train. There were frequent broken rails, when the ganger would request permission for line possession for a short time, between trains. There were signal failures, and so on.

We had a night mail train, the "Bangor Mail," which left Leeds at 10.42pm, the actual destination varying between Swansea and Aberystwyth, but in the 19th century it went to Bangor, and the name stuck. Shortly after the Great Train Robbery (August 1963) our mail train came to a stand about ten minutes after leaving Leeds; it probably had engine trouble but I cannot now remember. I think the first we heard was when the police telephoned us, to ask what was wrong. This was the days before mobile phones, so I couldn't imagine how they knew before we did.

Then there were complaints from drivers when they were stuck in loops for other trains to pass them. In particular the Birmingham (Saltley) drivers on the express goods to Carlisle expected a clear road. The ritual was always the same. The driver would ring from a signal box and say "Is that the Office?". I would ask where he was speaking from, and in the background I could hear him asking the signalman "Where are we bobby?" (bobby was the usual name for a signalman). I was never sure if the driver was pulling my leg or really did not know where he was. Probably the latter.

We always cleared everything out of the way for the Saltley men, who lodged at Carlisle and were in a hurry. If the 3.50 a.m. Water Orton-Carlisle 'fitted' got behind the 8.30 Bradford-Morecambe slow passenger train, that could severely delay the 'fitted'. On one occasion the controller went to the extreme of shunting the Morecambe train down the slow line at Bingley for the 'fitted' to go by. Unfortunately a passenger on the train complained and asked if it was usual practice to allow goods trains to overtake passenger trains. After that we always held back the passenger train, out of sight at Shipley (Bradford Jct.), until the 'fitted' was well away. The complaints stopped.

I was once let down by a Saltley driver on the evening "fitted", which had stopped at Skipton short of steam. He had a Fowler 2-6-0 Crab instead of the usual Black Five, but explained that once his mate had got steam up, you wouldn't see him for dust. I fell for that one, and spent the next hour or two shunting him around between Settle Jct. and Blea Moor. Things didn't improve much when they introduced the 9Fs with mechanical stokers on this turn. They gobbled up coal to such an extent that if they ran late they wouldn't have enough coal left to get to Carlisle. They would then ditch the train, and the engine, somewhere en route, and make their way 'on the cushions' to Carlisle to lodge.

I was once taking train reports from the 'box lad' at Altofts Jct. when the morning Birmingham-Carlisle 'fitted' passed, and I heard "Oops, my mate has forgotten to pull off the starter, no, it's OK, the driver has seen that Altofts station has pulled all off, so he's kept going". This was a good case of 'Signal Passed at Danger' (SPD), but as the signalman hadn't reported it, I wasn't going to either. Reported SPDs were extremely rare and the disaster I mentioned at Keighley is the only one that comes to my mind that I was personally involved with. There is no doubt that SPDs went unreported, and the driver would have a word with the signalman and that was enough. My first excursion on the main line, around 1948, was on a MR 3P 4-4-0 which had faulty Westinghouse brakes, and when running light engine back to Holbeck shed the driver was unable to stop in time and had to put the engine into reverse to stop. He squared it up with the signalman. But the driver was not very good at braking anyway. A short while afterwards, driving an LYN 2-4-2T on a passenger train, he finished up with level crossing gates festooned around the front of the engine. He never drove again on the main line.

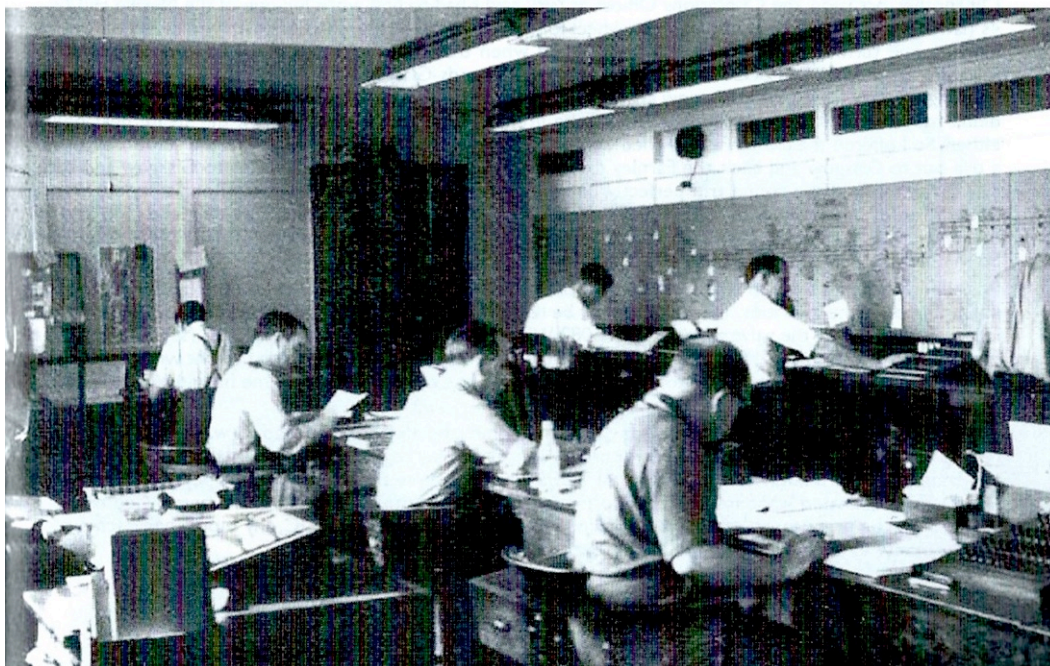
Another incident reported to me concerned the display of red lights at the back of a goods brake van. On 'non-fitted' trains the guard had to display two red lights high up, one at each side, in addition to the statutory tail lamp. When entering a passing loop, the guard had to replace the upper right red light by a white light. On one occasion a freight train was in the up loop at Blea Moor, when the following up Scots express came to a sudden halt. The agitated driver telephoned me from the signal box to say he had just had a fright. After emerging from Blea Moor tunnel, he had rounded the bend and seen three red lights dead ahead, and had slammed on the brakes. The goods guard had forgotten to change the right hand side light. I imagine he was fast asleep.

Sometimes the driver took the wrong route. On one occasion the overnight St. Pancras-Leeds express went down the goods line from Hunslet Goods Jct., after having been incorrectly signalled and the signalman thought he was shunting a goods train out of the way of the express. Fortunately there was nothing else ahead on this 'Permissive Section' and it came straight back out on to the main line at Engine Shed Jct. The driver phoned Control at Leeds station and spoke to the DCC, asking if it could be covered up, as he had had an unblemished career and was about to retire. Unfortunately for him, the reply was "No".

On one occasion Sheffield Control rang to say the Poole-Leeds (I think that was its title) had just left Sheffield with a GVR engine, but not to worry, as there was a footplate inspector on board accompanying the Bradford (Low Moor) crew. I decided that it should be safe between Huddersfield and Leeds over the New Line, there

Leeds District Control in the period described by Maurice Boddy in his article. Maurice is furthest from the camera at the extreme left hand end of the train situation board at the front of the office. In the early sixties the editor also spent three years working in the then new Middlesbrough Divisional Control, by which time each controller used individual graphs rather than the pegboard diagrams to monitor the the traffics progress.

Maurice Boddy



being no platforms, and I could send the engine light to York for them to return it south over the Swinton & Knottingley route (over which they were permitted). I spoke to the Farnley driver waiting at Huddersfield to work the train forward and he said he was happy. But I then had second thoughts and asked Hillhouse shed to turn off one of their 73xxx 4-6-0s to switch engines at Huddersfield. It was just as well. The footplate inspector had dropped off at Penistone, the engine had scraped platform edges on the way, and the Low Moor men climbed off the engine at Huddersfield refusing to move it another inch. The engine sojourned on Hillhouse shed for a few days. I was on night shift a day or two later when the shed foreman said he had a set of men waiting, the engine was in steam and where could he send it. He was fed up with train spotters all over the shed. Eventually authority was received to return it light engine, during the night, to Crewe.

A lot of outward turns had no back working and the rule was that the train crews would ring Control for instructions, which was invariably "Home passenger". But beware of misinformation. There was one Stourton guard who told me that when he worked south, to say Rotherham, and rang Control, he always said he was a Burton guard and it usually worked. He usually returned home passenger. Also I once had a Skipton guard, with a speech impediment, and his Skipton came out as Tipton which confused me, and he wasn't happy when I repeated to him "Tipton?" I think he replied, Tipton t'other side o' Keighley.

Things were never the same with the diesels. They brought different sorts of problem. With the multiple units (DMU), power cars and trailers were sometimes mixed up according to mechanical availability, though there was one shift at Neville Hill depot that seemed to spend all night shunting them around so they were back in correct formation by early morning. Twin sets would be coupled together and sent down to Leeds station at, say 6.0am, with perhaps four sets at a time for pathing purposes because of the bottleneck (which still exists) east of the station. At the station they would then be split into separate twins and I recall one occasion when the last twin turned out to be a pair of (engine-less) trailers coupled together. On another occasion a train from Skipton consisted of two twin sets, but when it left Keighley, the first stop, the sets came apart. They had never been properly coupled, only the jumper cables.

On another occasion when I was Power Controller, I was informed that the Type 4 (latterly Cl.40) diesel on the Newcastle-Liverpool express was failing, and the Darlington standby A3 would be put on. This now involved a change of engines in Leeds, and I arranged for Farnley shed to send a steam engine to Leeds station and for the Liverpool (Edge Hill) crew waiting at Leeds to be advised. Then York Power Control said the diesel was now working alright, so I cancelled all the steam engine arrangements. A couple of hours later York Power Control rang to ask if I had changed to the A3 at Leeds. I said as far as I was aware it was a diesel going through. Oh dear, the diesel had failed at Darlington, and yes it was the Darlington standby A3. I spoke to the station inspector at Leeds and asked what had happened. He said he had had a lot of trouble with the Edge Hill crew who weren't happy seeing a steam engine, but with a lot of persuasion they eventually went.

On another occasion, the Operations Officer at York said I had to find work for one of the Neville Hill Type 4s (latterly Cl.40) which had not moved a wheel for some time and regardless of cost. Neville Hill only really had the one turn, the 9.10am "North Briton" and when that train departed there was nothing until the following day's 9.10. So I decided to put it on the 10.35 Leeds-Glasgow express, normally a Holbeck Type 4 working (latterly Cl.45), with Glasgow crew after lodging. York agreed this was a good idea. Glasgow drivers didn't have the right traction knowledge, and the fireman wouldn't be able to work the steam heat boiler either. So I offered the job to Farnley shed who immediately sent a set of men down to the station, eager for a trip out to Glasgow and back, the Farnley driver of course being conducted through to Glasgow and back. The diesel worked the round trip perfectly, but the Motive Power Officer at Leeds (Ronnie Taylor) wasn't happy I had pinched one of his diesels which he said he might have wanted for something else. He said he would tell the Operations Officer at York to mind his own business in future and not interfere with his engines. So that episode was not repeated.

Ronnie Taylor was a staunch Gresley supporter and as a draughtsman had worked on the Hush-Hush 10000 at Darlington in the 'twenties. In fact it can now be revealed that Ronnie Taylor was the draughtsman involved in the examination of the valve gear of GWR 4082 *Windsor Castle* at Darlington in July 1925 (see "Locomotives of the L.N.E.R.", Part 2A, p.15). After the fiasco with A3s at Holbeck I am pleased to say that when York asked Ronnie to take on a number of V2s for use at Holbeck in place of Jubilees, he told me he had refused to have anything to do with them.

I left the Control Office in 1965, but it was quite some time later that it was closed. It was an archaic system relying too much on manpower, and the future lay in trains being regulated by the signallers and computers, and train load information being recorded by TOPS. In due course the various Train Operating Companies (TOC) have reinstated what are in effect Information Offices that can liaise with Signal Control Centres. But it would not be practical to resurrect old-style Control Offices with each TOC, any more than each airline could operate its own Air Traffic Control system.