

## 14. Water for steam locomotives

*The following note by Phoebe Merrick was included in the Group's Newsletter January 2012:*

An article in a recent edition of Local History News (published by the British Association for Local History) raised a largely overlooked point about railway stations. Steam engines need water and this once meant railway companies having to make their own arrangements. We think of coal yards adjacent to railway stations to provide the heat to make the steam, but few people think about the collection and storage of the necessary water. The article particularly discussed the need when Paddington Station in London was built.

Here in Romsey we can see the old tank above the gents' lavatories on Platform 1. Whether that is the place where the water was first stored, or is a construct of the post-water main era, I have no idea. Has anyone else thought about the problem? Presumably, the railway took its water from the nearby Fishlake, given the location of the cistern. In about 1860 the railway company bought and closed the canal, but there is no reason to think that that was the source of their water.

*Keith Dawe, one of our railway experts responded with the following comments:*

Your thoughts on the availability of water for steam engines at railway stations is a little optimistic. There were very few stations that had water facilities – Romsey just happened to be one of them.

Even so, I do not recall there being a column on the down side (could be mistaken) but there certainly was a column on the up side which was accessible from the up yard head-shunt. I never had occasion to use it from the up side platform, so do not know if it reached (doubtful). The facility was in use daily by the Romsey/Dean Hill pick-up freight when at the completion of shunting in the up yard, the locomotive tank was filled prior to cantering off over the Nursling road to Millbrook.

The tank supplying the column and station toilets would NOT be filled from the mains but would have been pumped from a natural water supply.

The tank above the gents lavatories itself was also not very big when you consider that in the last years of steam working the local pick-up freight was allocated a Standard Class 4 tank engine (80xxx) which would take on anything up to 2000 gallons at a time.

Water was a constant consideration for steam enginemen and those making up the working diagrams.

It may surprise you to know that even at the main railway hub of the region – Eastleigh – water was not available on the station platforms.

Taking an arc from Winchester – Salisbury – Bournemouth, water facilities available on the main running line were at Winchester; Southampton Central; Romsey; Salisbury. The only other places were Eastleigh Loco depot, Southampton Terminus Loco Depot, Redbridge Sleeper works, Brockenhurst Loco sidings and Bournemouth Loco shed, all of which are of little use when working a train.

Basically you made absolutely sure the locomotive tank or tender was completely full before you left the Loco shed and took on additional water if and when the opportunity arose. But if you did run out of water it was your own fault and you were in deep trouble.

I should also say that the coal yards adjacent to the station was purely for the supply of household coal and nothing whatever to do with steam locomotives. It was entirely unsuitable for a locomotive firebox.