

PRE M62 RAILWAY EXCURSIONS TO CUP MATCHES

Younger fans may be interested to know that prior to the construction of the M62, which reached Castleford in 1974, British Rail, who at the time ran the railway network, put on special trains from Castleford railway station for important games and most of the supporters took advantage of this mode of convenient travel as the trains would consist of about a dozen carriages of the old style separate compartments or the then newer style compartments with tables for every set of four seats and toilets at the end of each carriage.

Most trains had a buffet car in the centre of the train which sold bacon sandwiches and light refreshments including alcohol so you could sit back, enjoy the ride, have a few games of cards and be fully refreshed before the match.

My first such trip was in 1966 to Warrington for the Challenge Cup first round match. I went with my friends who were mainly much older than me and according to the attached advert the cost was 13 shillings (65p). I don't remember much about the journey itself, I would have been 11, but I do remember the crowds of Castleford fans crossing over a bridge at Warrington railway station as we made our way to Wilderspool, the old Warrington ground.

Unfortunately the train journeys were the best thing about the day as we lost 15-7.

My next trip by rail was to Workington in 1968 for the Challenge Cup second round match. My recollections of that day are pretty vague but I do remember the train crossing Morecambe Bay, with the sands either side of the railway line. On the return journey we stopped for quite a while and I remember pulling down the carriage window and asking a passing railwayman where we were and him saying "Carnforth, Lancashire". As I got older I found out that Carnforth railway station was the setting for the film classic "Brief Encounters". I remember also that the game was a real old fashioned cup tie with Cas coming out on top 7-2 and being part of a pitch invasion at the final whistle from the hordes of Cas fans in the stand at the side of the pitch.

The following rail trip was a very special occasion, it was for the Challenge Cup final in 1969 versus Salford. This time I was with my dad, a family friend and my younger brother and my mum bought us two matching roll neck sweaters in a buff colour, the nearest she could get to amber. This was in the days before replica shirts of course.

There were a few trains you could book for the final, some departing on the Friday evening, but we went on one that departed Castleford about 9am direct to Wembley Central, which is about a half hour walk from the stadium. We arrived around 1pm and enroute had a pre-arranged lunch at a Wembley church. When we eventually got closer to the ground I remember seeing thousands of Cas fans outside of a pub and it looked like we had taken the place over.

For some reason my brother and I weren't in the same section as the grown up's and in fact we were near the top of the opposite end to where the players emerged from the tunnel. As it turned out we were at the end where the decisive tries were scored by Alan Hardisty and Keith Hepworth to ensure Cas won the trophy for the first time in 34 years. What a day.

The next trip by rail was the following season. In the second round of the Challenge Cup

we were drawn away to Barrow who weren't a bad side, having been beaten finalists just three years before. Again I went with friends. I was fifteen by now and it must have been about this time that my mum waved me off saying "Don't come home if you've lost". I don't know if it was wishful thinking on her part but luckily for me Cas invariably won on these adventures. I vaguely remember walking around the shipyard on arriving at Barrow and then being in a covered stand behind the posts where you couldn't see the top of them. Barrow had a prodigious ex Rugby Union goalkicker in Keith Jarrett who literally could kick a goal from 60 yards out but again after a hard fought tussle we were victorious 12-4.

A narrow home quarter final win over Salford saw Cas draw St. Helens at Station Road, Swinton and again British Rail put special trains on. This time I went with my cousin and as we entered the stand at the "Castleford" end we were surprised to see four middle aged St.Helens fans stood right in the middle of the Cas fans. Near the end of the game, which we won 6-3, scoring three drop goals (then worth two points) to a try, all hell broke loose as these four Saints fans started fighting with the Cas lads. Needless to say we got out of there pretty quickly and I just remember queuing outside the station for our train back home feeling great that we were going back to Wembley.

Unfortunately my dad couldn't get time off work to go to Wembley in 1970 but my Uncle said he would look after my brother and I and my cousin, his son. They lived at Normanton but fortunately the train picked up from there also. My uncle was concert secretary of a club in Normanton and he had arranged to bring a barrel of beer from the club to drink on the train. The barrel was empty by the time the train had left Yorkshire and I remember us trying to hold my uncle up as we got off the train at Wembley Central. Luckily he had sobered up by the time we reached the stadium. This time we were lower down at the tunnel end and had a great view of the team parading the cup as we had won again 7-2.

The next two seasons we were travelling by train again in the first round both years to Whitehaven. The first one we went the same route as we did for Workington and we won 15-0. The second one there was some blockage south of Whitehaven and we had to go via Carlisle, presumably over the Ribbleshead viaduct which I didn't appreciate at the time, and change to a diesel unit to continue our journey down to Whitehaven. On embarking at Carlisle to change platforms we realised that we had arrived about the same time as Tottenham fans who were playing Carlisle in the FA Cup the same afternoon. Luckily I don't think there were any unsavoury incidents. Again Cas were victorious 17-0 and I remember the diesel unit taking us back to Carlisle had to make an unscheduled stop at one of the stations enroute. Older fans will remember the brothers who lived in the doss house at the top of Rhodes Street who were newspaper sellers. One of them had somehow got on the wrong train and he came bounding across the platform to be reunited with his travelling companions.

The final train journey, at least before the M62 was built, was for the semi final in 1973 against Featherstone at Headingley. This one was disappointingly a four carriage diesel unit and turned out to be a foretaste as to what was to come, we lost 17-3 and with it went the memorable train journeys.

Steve Poole

Acknowledgements Pontefract & Castleford Express, the staff at Castleford Library.

GO BY RAIL — FOR THE MATCH

RUGBY LEAGUE CUP 1st ROUND

WARRINGTON v. CASTLEFORD

**BUFFET CAR EXCURSION
TO WARRINGTON — 13/-**

Saturday 26th February

Bookings available from CASTLEFORD CENTRAL

Due to later kick-off, train times will be announced shortly

—Enquire at station for details

Light Refreshments available
PLEASE BOOK IN ADVANCE



British Rail