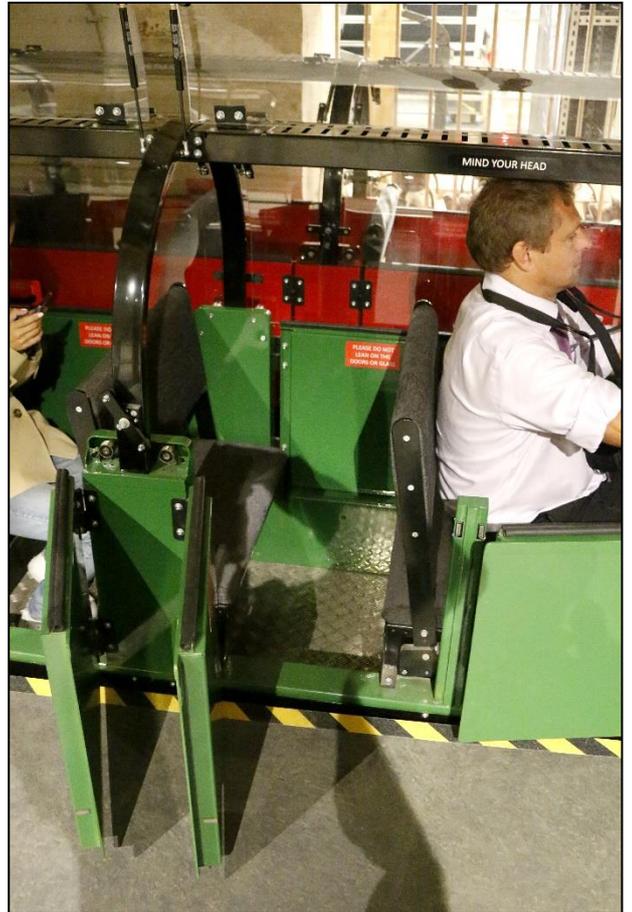


THE POSTAL MUSEUM AND MAIL RAIL

by Stuart Hicks

I made my visit to the Postal Museum and Mail Rail on 4 September 2017, which was the first day that public trains were running, the museum having opened some weeks ago. They were off to a low key start, with only the green train running on the railway's opening day. I understand that only one train (so a 20-minute interval service) will be running for the next few weeks, although they tested both trains running on Friday and it worked (and there is signalling!). The accompanying photographs complement those in the previous issue of *Underground News* and are all by your writer.



The green train was the only one in service on 4 September 2017, seen here (*Above*) arriving in the former depot area in a specially constructed platform, the red train being stabled to its left. The access and seats in the trains (*Right*) are comfortable – for some!

However, both trains appear to follow the same route from the departure platform back to it, so you can visit once for the track although you need to return to get both sets for 'haulage'. Certainly, on a not very busy day, I suspect that you could turn up close to your advertised time and choose

your set, judging by the fact that were people with 11.15, 11.25 and 11.35 tickets being scanned onto my train. Some tickets are available every day for walk-in visitors.



There are two separate buildings, the Postal Museum slightly to the north up the road in Phoenix Place and on its west side (*Left*). This has displays of the history of the Post Office, including the telephone service and telegrams. It includes over a dozen pillar boxes, including an Olympic gold box, a blue air mail box and a rare Edward VIII box, along with a mail coach. There are plenty of interactive displays. There are also some interesting glass slides and a pneumatic tube apparatus which you can use and send a message. Another unusual exhibit are the VC and other medals of Sergeant Knight of the post office rifles.

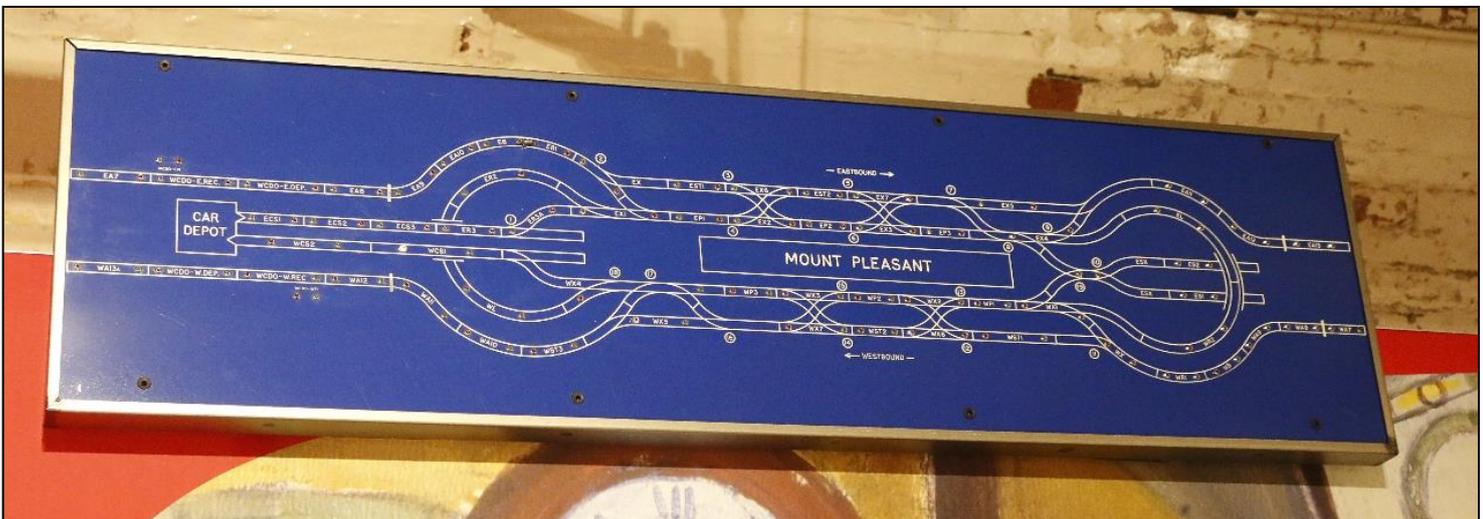
In addition, there is an early post bus, a collection of post office stores, various post office magazines (that you can finger through), a post office Sari and other uniforms. Allow around an hour for this part. There is also a coffee shop and an extensive shop (with free Wi-Fi).

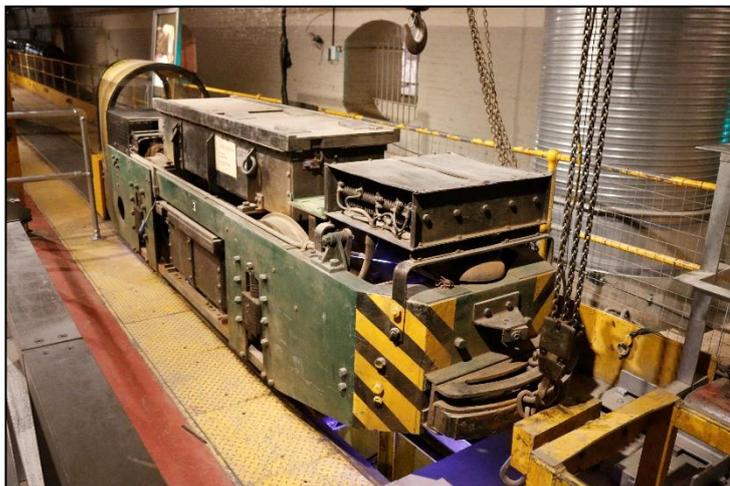
A little way down the road is the entrance to Mail Rail. There is another extensive shop here – mostly rather expensive souvenirs, along with further unisex toilets and lockers (returnable pound coin). The Mail Rail exhibition starts in the old depot area downstairs. There are several large pictures as you wait for the train departure (*Below*).



There is a siding next to the departure platform on which the red train was sitting out of use. Before long, the green train arrived and was soon loaded and ready for departure. The route is basically out of the depot, down past the sand drag to the eastbound platform, round the loop, past the westbound platform and back up the depot. The train stops at predetermined places in both platforms and elsewhere in tunnels for DVDs to be played. You can briefly see the line of abandoned units in the sidings under the loop at the far end of the station. The whole journey takes approaching 20 minutes (a 10/20-minute train frequency is intended). Once alighted, there are more exhibits here. There are several Mail Rail vehicles, including a battery car and various other items rescued when the line closed (staff cupboards, tools etc,) and also the original Mount Pleasant control panel and diagram – and a simplified version that visitors can try to use. Another hour should be allowed here. Overall, a visit is recommended to those interested in postal history and/or Mail Rail.

The original track diagram for Mount Pleasant now on display (*Below*), battery locomotive (*Lower, Left*) and a 1930 English Electric car in Mail Rail red (*Lower, Right*).





PHOTOGRAPHS

Opposite: (Top) An unidentified Metropolitan Line S8 crosses the Grand Union Canal near Croxley on 26 May 2012. The Croxley Rail Link extension to Watford Junction now seems as far off as ever, despite the S8 fleet already having one extra train for it.

Opposite: (Lower) At Ealing Broadway on 18 November 2015, DM 21391 leads on this departing train. It is performing the role of the Auto Visual Inspection train, as seen by the lighting under the trailing bogie of the leading car, and the recording equipment either side of the front cab door.

A STOCK MEMORIES

Overleaf: A Stock in the snow: On 19 December 2010, DM 5048 leads a northbound train on the northbound local line at Harrow South Junction (1), while DM 5072 leads a southbound train into Rickmansworth (2) on 8 February 2007, drawing a superb arc as it does. A62 DM 5229 is at the rear of the same train departing Rickmansworth, also arcing and sparking (3). At Moor Park DM 5123 leads on the northbound local (4). Two A62 DMs are at the end of the line at Watford (5) on 7 May 2009 with 5219 on the left and 5187 on the right. The future of Watford station is perhaps assured for longer than first thought because the extension to Watford Junction appears to be stalled. A62 Stock DM 5145 leads whilst approaching Northwood Hills (6) on the southbound local line on 18 December 2010 – note the icicles hanging down under the bridge at top right. Back at Moor Park, A62 DM 5183 leads on the southbound main (7) on 18 December 2010. Still in action in 2017 is the A Stock Rail Adhesion Train. It is seen here at North Harrow (8) heading south on 27 November 2015 with DM 5111 leading. Departing Rayners Lane westbound on 15 May 2012 (9) and with only a few weeks of passenger service left, 5113 leads heading off to Uxbridge. This unit was only recently scrapped from Acton Works. In the foreground are two tracks of the former long-closed and disconnected goods yard. Quite why some of the trackwork has remained for over 50 years since closure is a bit of a mystery.

All photos: Richard Stiles