

## THE 'NIGHT F



This is the first post-war 'Night Ferry' waiting to leave Victoria station on 15th December 1947 behind SR 4-6-2 No.21C156 (later 'Battle of Britain' *Croydon*) and L1 4-4-0 No.1757. (Pendragon Collection)

### The Times, Tuesday, 13th October 1936, page 13

#### NEW TRAIN FERRY DOVER–DUNKIRK ROUTE OPENED A BOON TO BAD SAILORS

[From our special correspondent, Dover, 12th October.]

"By pressing a button on the pump house at the new ferry dock at Dover, the French Ambassador – M. Corbin – today officially inaugurated the Southern Railway Company's new through sleeping car service between London and Paris via Dover and Dunkirk. The button gave a signal for the lowering of the dock gates, and when these had disappeared beneath the water, the steamer 'Hampton Ferry' steamed into the harbour on her voyage, which today was to Calais.

"Half an hour earlier a number of guests of the company from London and Paris assembled in the steamer's garage on the top deck, where the Ambassador said that every new route that was opened stimulated traffic and brought about an increase in trade. The present time offered particular reasons for anticipating such an expansion. The currency statement which had just been carried out by the French Government following an understanding with London and Washington, and the steps taken a few days ago in France in order to relieve the pressure of tariffs and modify, or even abolish quotas, would promote the development of trade between the two countries. The new route would be one of the first to benefit from these advantages. The ferry service would attract many business men, for whom every hour counted. They should no longer have reason to avoid a journey which had been purposely devised to save their time and energies."

### Closer relations

For those interested in history or archaeology,

for lovers of landscape and ancient monuments, few countries offered so many resources as France. Now that the journey was going to lay a smaller burden on their pocket, it was hoped that more British travellers than ever would stop in his country and its capital. Since the War Frenchmen seemed to have given up those stay at home habits, with which they had always been credited. They were met far more frequently today in the United Kingdom than ever before. From now on they would have at their disposal another attractive way to reach the centre of the Empire. All these visitors from one side of the Channel to the other helped to establish closer relations and contacts, which fostered the mutual comprehension so essential to Franco-British friendship. The men who had forged that new link deserved their gratitude for facilities which might to some extent strengthen and tighten the bond between their two great nations.

Mr. R. Holland-Martin, the chairman of the company, who presided on behalf of the Southern Railway, extended thanks to the French Ambassador for being there on that occasion, which was an indication of his feeling towards the new link with France. The train ferry was the fulfilment of a dream by Sir Herbert Walker (General Manager) and its construction had been fraught with very great difficulties among which were the high rise in the tide and the fact that the site was a very windy one in which to put the ferry. In looking for a port on the other side of the Channel, they chose Dunkirk on account of its magnificent docks and the great improvements which had been carried out there.

### Work under the sea

When the work was started at Dover geologists assured that what they put down

*Backtrack* for both November and December 2016 contained a fascinating two-part article by R. A. S. Hennessey surveying the history of train ferries in Britain and elsewhere. A recent reading of the newspaper files of *The Times* of London has allowed the following material to be extracted, presented here by **ARNOLD TORTORELLA**.

would be on solid chalk. The first difficulty they encountered was the weather and then when they started to build walls of concrete, it was found that there were fissures in the chalk rock formation forming the sea bed. Finally, they decided it would be necessary to carry out the work under the sea and this had been successfully done under Mr. George Ellison, the company's chief engineer, to whom and to the contractor Mr. Holland-Martin offered congratulations.

As to the users of the ferry, people who were bad sailors, had for a long time dreaded the necessary changing from train to ship, but that would now be avoided, and passengers could travel in comfortable sleepers. They would go to bed at Victoria and sleep right through the journey to Paris, arriving there in time for their work in the morning.

The service should also be a great help to trade, as the objection to sending perishable goods and breakables had been that of transshipment. Goods could now be placed anywhere in Europe and the wagons would go right through.

Many of the guests, among whom was Sir John Simon, the Home Secretary, crossed in the steamer to Calais. Among those who were on board but came ashore were Lord Willingdon, Lord Warden of the Cinque Ports, and the Mayor of Dover, Alderman G. M. Norman.

The same page above also published a small black and white photograph, measuring 5½in long by 5in tall with the caption "The 'Hampton Ferry' leaving Dover after the inauguration of the new train ferry service by M. Corbin, the French Ambassador."

### The Times, Wednesday 14th October 1936, page 8

#### NEW TRAIN FERRY SERVICE FROM LONDON TO PARIS WHILE SLEEPING

#### FRENCH CARS AT VICTORIA

[From our special correspondent]

"The inauguration of the train ferry service between Paris and London, begun on Monday with the ceremonial lowering of the dock gates at Dover, was completed yesterday morning when, for the first time, an international sleeping-car express which had left the Nord station in Paris some 11 hours earlier arrived with passengers at Victoria Station. The train had crossed the sea and the travellers had made the journey from one capital to the other while they slept."

Pullman cars were familiar at Victoria, but this train of French cars with the inscription of the Compagnie Internationale



# 'FERRY'— AS INTRODUCED IN *THE TIMES*



des Wagon-Lits above each coach and indicators reading 'Paris-London' was new. Something of the Continent had been brought to London in a way that could not

**London Victoria and on this autumn evening the 'Night Ferry' will be taken by a Class 33 diesel-electric locomotive on its journey to Dover Western Docks.**  
(Allan Trotter)

be suggested by a boat-train. What it meant was indicated by Sir George Clerk, British Ambassador in Paris, on Monday night when he said that it would now be possible to travel from London to Istanbul without a change of carriage.

A large section of the company present at Dover for the opening of the ferry dock proceeded to Calais by the steamer *Hampton Ferry* and then to Paris to make the first

**A close-up view of the compartments of berths 1/2 and 3/4 of a 'Night Ferry' Type F sleeping car.** (Allan Trotter)

regular crossing by the service. This outward journey followed the usual routine of train, boat, and train as the ferry port on the French side was at Dunkirk. In Paris the guests were entertained at an inaugural banquet at the Hotel George V. M. Paul Ramadier,





Under Secretary for Mines, deputising for the Minister for Public Works, presided and during the evening he invested Sir Herbert Walker, General Manager of the Southern Railway, with the insignia of a Commander of the Legion of Honour and Mr. Charles Cooper, Continental Manager of the line, with that of Chevalier of the order.

### The Magic Carpet

Sir John Simon, the British Home Secretary, described the creation of the service as equal to the story of the magic carpet and said that the train ferry should entirely remove the average Englishman's dread of a rough Channel crossing. In England, he added, we no longer feared a French invasion and would welcome French visitors by this new link between their country and ours.

Mr. R. M. Holland Martin, the SR chairman, said that the ferry would help to cement friendships between the countries of the world. Anything that facilitated trade and commerce between nations helped also the peace of the world. The ferry was now ready, he announced, for its work and for the first fortnight the passenger list was fully booked.

After the banquet two trains, both consisting of six sleeping cars, left the Gare du Nord for London. The passengers entered their berth when the trains steamed out of the station and remained in bed when the coaches were shunted at Dunkirk on to four sets of rails on the train deck of the *Twickenham Ferry*. There was some shouting in French and some clanking of chains before the trains were settled in their positions for the sea passage, but the noise would not have awakened sound sleepers. The crossing could not have been more comfortable and at breakfast time, when

**The corridor side of a Type F sleeping car at Victoria. No doubt one of the reasons for the demise of the 'Night Ferry' was the alternative air services being advertised inciting passengers to fly 'Super Jets'.** (Allan Trotter)

rolls and coffee were brought to the berths by French attendants, the *Twickenham Ferry* was in dock at Dover with the drawbridge down waiting for engines to make up the trains again.

The first train arrived at Victoria at 11.00am, but a slight mishap in hauling the second train off the steamer led to delay. The last of the sleeping coaches, in which Sir John Simon, Mr. Holland-Martin, Sir Herbert Walker and others were travelling was derailed by, it was believed, some obstruction which fouled the metals. The passengers were transferred to another coach and the train then left for London.

### Services for the Public

"The first of the ferry trains for the public would leave Victoria Station tonight [Wednesday 14th October 1936] at 10.00pm and was due to arrive in Paris at 8.55am tomorrow morning. The corresponding service from Paris would begin tonight, leaving Paris (Nord) at 9.50am, to arrive in London at 8.30am, the following morning. The services would then run every night in each direction."

Sleeping cars of the most modern type, decorated in blue, had been specially constructed by the Wagon-Lits Company for running over the British and French lines. The cars were about 63 feet long and could each take nine first class or eighteen second class passengers. In the second class coaches

the compartments were the same as in the first class, with the exception that they contained two sleeping berths instead of one. Arrangements had been made for customs and passport examinations to be made on the outward journey shortly before the train reached Paris; in the reverse direction the French examination would take place immediately after the train left Paris and the English examination on arrival at Victoria.

The charges for the use of the sleeping cars would be £1 12s 6d first class and £1 5s 6d second class, in addition to the ordinary fares via Dunkirk. The costs included reservation fees and gratuity to the sleeping car attendant.

Three vessels, averaging about 2,840 tons, had been constructed for the new service and each had been named after a famous Thames ferry. To convey the trains, the ship had to have a width of over 60ft and the tunnels had been rigged to port and starboard. Above the train deck restaurants, saloons and private cabins had been provided for passengers who did not travel in the sleeping cars and there was also a garage with room for 25 motor cars. In addition to the night services the ferry boats would also run a day service, except on Saturdays, between Dunkirk and Dover for passengers, motor cars and goods traffic. The times of departure would be 1.15pm from Dover and 2.15pm from Dunkirk.

Interested readers will also find a fuller history of the Dover–Dunkirk train ferry service within *Night Ferry* by George Behrend and Gary Buchanan (Jersey Artists Ltd., 1985).

*The author is a member of The LMS Society.*

