

## 30<sup>th</sup> January 1965

I became an avid trainspotter in my very early teens. Later, as my interest in sport took hold, I played both football and rugby at school so it was natural that I wanted to continue playing when I attended Bulmershe Teacher Training College, Reading from 1964 to 1967. Bulmershe only opened for business in September 1964, so like-minded ball players quickly established our respective sports clubs. We, the rugby team, played in black strip. I guess this was a nod to the famous All Blacks. The now defunct Reading Evening Post wrote a feature about us in our formative days.



THE Bulmershe Teacher Training College team pictured before their game on Saturday. Back row: A. Baldock, M. Gill, C. Stafford, M. Higley, A. Evans, R. Evans, D. Fossett, D. Brown. Front row: A. Storey, C. Rudge, B. Cooper, S. Cocking, J. Farrow, W. Baker and P. Heales.

In the beginning we struggled to find regular fixtures but soon became involved with other nearby colleges and rugby clubs. An early fixture versus London Irish 6ths didn't provide too much quality rugby but boy, the after-match drinking was awesome! We quickly became a winning side thanks to a very strong contingent of Welsh guys. Our scrum half, kneeling far left, was head of the PE department. The rest of us were students. We arranged a match for 30<sup>th</sup> January 1965 at Culham Teacher Training College, Abingdon, a very short journey from Reading. We boarded the coach and set off westwards.



Not far short of our destination, we crossed over a railway line. On the map, the arrow shows the Culham College location. Just to the east is the railway line we were about to cross. Abingdon is top left with the Thames meandering through the landscape. As we approached the bridge over the railway with a clear view of the tracks to the left, my earlier trainspotting interest kicked in.

I spent my formative years in Poole where the southern region of British Rail ruled. In those days each region's locomotives were quite distinct and easily identifiable.

The Waterloo – Weymouth service was mainly hauled by two very similar but easily distinguishable designs with unique streamlining. The heavier and more powerful version took their names from shipping lines and were thus the Merchant Navy class. A slightly less powerful version, but almost

identical in appearance, took their names from towns in the south-west and, in recognition of “The Few”, some were given names associated with the RAF and the very recent Second World War. These locos thus formed the West Country and Battle of Britain class. In a ceremony at Waterloo railway station on 11 September 1947 one of them was officially named **Winston Churchill**.

Meanwhile, back on the coach near Abingdon, I noticed a train approaching. I seem to remember a dank, grey day. The loco’s smoke and steam couldn’t fail to attract attention, especially that of an ex-trainspotter.



Here, we were in the middle of western region country whose locos were adorned with the distinctive brass pepper pot design of the steam safety valve surround. No sign of this on what was approaching. I suddenly realised that the stranger was a southern region Battle of Britain loco. What on earth was it doing in foreign climes?

Daylight dawned. The state funeral and burial of Sir Winston Churchill, this country’s distinguished leader during the long years of the Second World War, coincided with our rugby match at Culham. The train approaching the bridge was headed by Battle of Britain class no 34051 Winston Churchill. Here she is heading the funeral train with people at the trackside to honour his passing. At the time, trains used white discs on the front of the loco as route identifiers. Here, his famous “V” sign is replicated.



Fortunately, this loco was earmarked for preservation after it was withdrawn from service later in 1965. Now, lovingly restored, she’s at the National Railway Museum in York. In 2015, to celebrate 50 years since the funeral, the special train was reassembled and displayed in all its glory at the railway museum at Shildon, County Durham. See below.

