

## BRITAIN'S RAILWAY QUEENS

The tradition of electing a Railway Queen began in 1925 as part of the celebrations for the railway centenary commemorating 100 years since the opening of the Stockton and Darlington railway.

One of the aims of the carnival was to help re-build links between railway management, workers and the three railway unions, (ASLEF, NUR, TSSA) during a turbulent period for the railways which had been shaken by the strike of 1922 and the grouping of the railways during 1923. The carnival took place at Belle Vue, Manchester, attracting an attendance of 50,000 people and was so successful that the carnival became an annual event at Belle Vue. The carnival developed into one of the main social

events of the year in the calendar of many railway workers. It was in the tradition maintained by many factories and firms, of the "works outing". It was so well attended that the railway companies had to run special trains to convey their staff to Manchester.

One of the centrepiece attractions of the event was the selection of the "Railway Queen". Entry to the contest was open to all girls from railway families between 12-16 years of age.

The prize of becoming the queen was much sought after and attracted hundreds of applications. The first Queen was Miss Helena May Wotton, the 15-year-old daughter of a carriage and wagon cleaner on the Great Western Railway at Kingswear. In a lavish ceremony where she was presented with a Royal Blue gown embroidered with gold braiding and artificial diamonds, a tiara and a Chain of Office.

The office of Railway Queen was held for a year and during her reign she would travel across the country visiting railway company offices and workshops to boost morale amongst railway workers. She also would support charitable endeavours, particularly those that benefitted the families of railway workers, including convalescent homes and hospitals. Reports of these visits were often included in the railway company magazines and trade union newspapers. Another important facet of the role was to foster links between British railway workers and those in other countries including continental Europe, the USA and the USSR. The Railway



*Irene Easton, Railway Queen in 1936*

Queen visited railway establishments in these countries and delivered messages of fraternity from British railway workers and their families.

Usually a Queen was selected annually although there were gaps during the second world war and the tradition continued through to the 1970s. In later years attendance at the carnival began to fall and the event became more difficult to finance. In 1971 the organising committee finally had to leave Belle Vue and the contest was held at different venues throughout Britain each year. The last Queen was crowned in 1975.

## The Regalia

The regalia for the Railway Queen consisted of two red gowns and two blue gowns, all in velvet, trimmed with gold braiding and artificial diamonds. One of the royal blue gowns is in the collection of the National Railway Museum.

There are 6 elegant studded tiaras, of different designs, and two chains of office. The outer chain is gold and consists of individual links in the form of a railway screw-coupling. This chain, known as the "International chain" was started in 1927 and grew as individual links were presented by the countries being visited by each Queen.



Each link bears the name of the country and the name of the Railway Queen who visited and offered as a gesture of peace and goodwill on the part of the railway workers around the world. The United Nations Association on learning of this symbol of worldwide peace and goodwill, presented their own emblem to add to the chain.



The centre chain is the emblem of British Railways and was presented to the reigning Railway Queen, Brenda Bower in 1957 by Sir Brian Robertson, Chairman of the British Transport Commission. During 1964/65 Norma Corrigan was presented with the emblems of the three railway trade unions, ASLEF, NUR and TSSA to add to the chain.

## The Railway Queens 1925-1975

No.	Year	Name	Railway Co. & Location
1	1925	Miss Helena Mary Wotton	GWR, Kingswear
2	1927	Miss Mabel Kitson	GWR, Colwall
3	1928	Miss Ena Best	LNER, Manchester
4	1929	Miss E M Brown	LMS, Preston
5	1930	Miss F L Dumelow	LMS, Derby
6	1931	Miss P E A Clark	SR, Sheerness
7	1932	Miss H M Goodall	LNER, Scunthorpe
8	1933	Miss Gracie Jones	LMS, Holyhead
9	1934	Miss Ruby Dovey	GWR, London
10	1935	Miss Elsie Audrey Mosson	LMS, Blackpool
11	1936	Miss Irene Mary Easton	M&GN, King's Lynn
12	1937	Miss Irene Topham	LNER, Shildon
13	1938	Miss Helen Forrest	LMS, Edinburgh
14	1939	Miss Kathleen Lawton	LMS, Huddersfield
15	1941	Mis Dorothy Northwood	GWR, Hadley (Salop)
16	1946	Miss Greta Richards	SR, Feltham (Middlesex)
17	1947	Miss Janet Taylor	LNER, Leeds
18	1948	Miss Beryl Parker	NER, Hull
19	1949	Miss Janet Evelyn Hubbard	ER, Ely
20	1950	Miss Betty Eileen Chester	LMR, Chesterfield
21	1951	Miss Eluned Jones	LMR, Crewe
22	1952	Miss Sheila Hollingsworth	LMR, Mansfield
23	1953	Miss Beryl Lunt	LMR, Maghull (Liverpool)
24	1954	Miss Marion C Long	ScR, Troon
25	1955	Miss Maureen K Hughill	WR, Wolverhampton
26	1956	Miss Brenda C Bower	ER, Doncaster
27	1957	Miss Teresa Boyden	ER, Peterborough
28	1958	Miss Gloria Cripps	LMR, Derby
29	1959	Miss Hazel Dobinson	NER, Darlington
30	1960	Miss Sheila Riordan	WR, London
31	1961	Miss Susan Garside	LMR, Southport
32	1962	Miss Pauline Gray	WR, Shrewsbury
33	1963	Miss Marion E Walker	LMR, Wembley
34	1964	Miss Norma Corrigan	LMR, Manchester
35	1965	Miss Barbara Fletcher	LMR, Oldham
36	1966	Miss Susan Anne Crich	ER, Doncaster
37	1967	Miss Susan J Tonge	ER, Mexborough
38	1968	Miss Therese Faulds	ScR, Troon
39	1969	Miss Marilyn Karen Pope	LMR, West Kirby (Liverpool)
40	1970	Miss Lynette Storr	ER, York
41	1971	Miss Sandra Hawkes	LMR, Manchester
42	1975	Miss Brenda Tomlinson	

## How to find out more

To find out about the individual Railway Queens, one of the best sources of information is the various railway company staff magazines that regularly reported on the activities and ceremonies attended by each Queen. These are available on the open shelving in Search Engine, the National Railway Museum's Library and Archive Centre.

A brief history to the Railway Queens and Belle Vue Railway Carnival is included in E.M Johnson's book - *An illustrated history of Longsight Motive Power Depot including the story of the Belle Vue Railway Carnival and the Railway Queens (Book Law, 2017)* (shelf mark E8J/89)

## Archive collections

There are also a number of archive collections that contain Railway Queen related material. These can be accessed by making an appointment in Search Engine- see [railwaymuseum.org.uk/research-and-archive](http://railwaymuseum.org.uk/research-and-archive) for details of how to visit and access our library and archive catalogues.

**2018-237** - Railway Queen photographs, 1925-1970s. Harry Neilson was one of the originators for the idea of a Railway Ambassador to foster good will and understanding throughout Britain etc. His role was Clerk of Proceedings. Material includes: 16 packages of black & white photographs, articles and correspondence relating to "Railway Queen" activities, 1925-1946; Railway Review Jubilee poster of important railway men, 1880-1930; Crowning of Britain's Railway Queen at Belle Vue Gardens, Manchester poster and draft copy, 1953; Notebook, 1920-1930; Correspondence and programmes, 1960-1973.

**1992-7432** - Papers and photograph albums of H A Short, 1921-1961. H A Short was appointed as Chief Regional Officer of North Eastern Region, British Railways in 1950. The material includes three scrapbooks of news cuttings 1935-1961 & photo albums for 1952-1954 (Railway Queen photos).

**2019-358** Archive of Lily Yeaman comprising of a newspaper clipping and five photographs of Helen Forrest on her visit to Edinburgh as railway queen and two photographs of servicemen at Hillside Crescent Railway Club

**2004-7644** - Photograph, portrait of Helen Forrest, Railway Queen, framed, 1938, 13th Railway Queen, 585mm x 755mm.

**2004-7645** - Photograph, portrait of Marjorie Goodall, Railway Queen, in glazed frame, 1932, 7th Railway Queen, 580mm x 755mm.

**2004-7646** - Photograph, portrait of Irene Easton, Railway Queen, in glazed frame, 1936, 11th Railway Queen, 585mm x 760mm