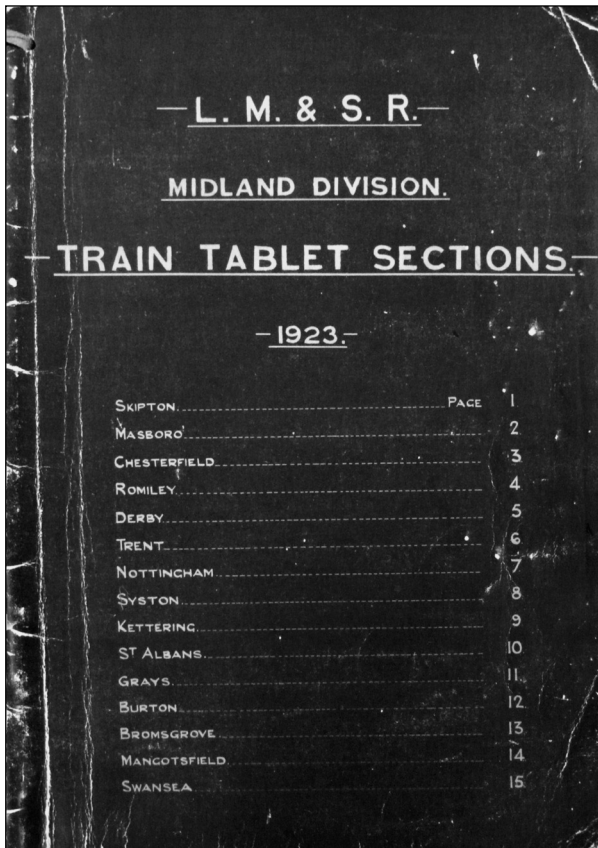




# ITEMS FROM THE STUDY CENTRE – 1

by Roy Burrows



Item No.13321 in the Midland Railway Study Centre is a 14 page large foolscap booklet which, as its title implies, lists all the train tablet sections in existence in 1923 which, almost certainly, means it defines the situation which existed at the end of the Midland Railway era. In support of this statement, I cite the fact that the booklet includes 20 sections in the Swansea District, including the Hereford - Three Cocks sections with the special night tablet Moorfields - Moorhampton. These lines were transferred very quickly to the Western Division at Crewe on 24 August 1923. The booklet is therefore likely to have been produced early in 1923. It has been amended, at some later unspecified date, to record the changes from tablet to key token on the Mansfield - Southwell line and between Staveley and Hall Lane Junctions.

The tablet configuration for each section is given and the material of which the tablet is made is specified. The column headings suggest three standard types: iron (do they really mean steel?), aluminium or fibre. In fact, only one aluminium tablet is mentioned (Hall Lane Junction - Seymour Junction) and there is also mention of one brass tablet as a 'special' 4 inch diameter  $\times$   $\frac{3}{16}$  inch thick for the Irchester Junction - Higham Ferrers section in configuration A. Some sections are shown as having two types of tablet. By far the most common material is fibre. This would seem to confirm that the fibre tablet was virtually standard on the Midland by 1922 and that the brass and brass/steel tablets that have survived (some with early hand engraving) were retained from earlier days as 'weights' at the top of the fibre stack in the machine. The examples I have in my personal collection from the Swadlincote loop are all engraved '1'.

The listing of only one aluminium tablet tends to confirm a theory I have that use of this lightweight metal for tablets on Midland lines was largely at the instigation of the LMS. However, the process may well have been started at Seymour Junction by the Midland in its final days.

An incidental, but interesting, point arises from studying this booklet. The tablet sections are listed by 'District' and, to me, some surprising names appear. The full list of these is: Skipton, Masboro', Chesterfield, Romiley, Derby, Trent, Nottingham, Syston, Kettering, St Albans, Grays, Burton, Bromsgrove, Mangotsfield, Swansea.

Does this represent the definitive list of final Midland Railway Signal Department Districts? To the best of my knowledge, they do not correspond with the Engineer's Department Districts, of which both the Signal and Telegraph Departments were still a part. I believe, at Mangotsfield in the early 1950s, the (by then) S&T Department occupied a small group of buildings of Midland Railway origin immediately to the west of Station Junction Signal Box on the down side of the line. No doubt, research of 2-chain plans would reveal the location of any S&T workshops at the more unlikely places on the list such as Romiley, Syston and Bromsgrove.

A slight digression is not out of place at this point. A Midland single line section, which does not feature in the booklet, is that between Hawes and Garsdale, which remained a train staff and ticket section into the British Railways era. It was not until the North Eastern Region took over the line that the change was made to Tyers No 6 tablet instruments, presumably to match equipment on the rest of the branch eastwards (although I have not checked this). Some years after the branch closed in 1959 I managed to acquire the two instruments from Garsdale and Hawes signal boxes. They languished at the back of my garden shed for 30 years until they moved with the rest of the collection to the Study Centre in 2004 - by then, not exactly in the best of condition. Last year, Tony Overton and Pete Wood agreed to restore them to working order on behalf of the Trust and this work is now well advanced. In view of their history, we felt that returning them to the Settle and Carlisle line was, perhaps, the most appropriate way to put them on public display. The Settle & Carlisle Trust have agreed that they can go in the Ribbleshead station Visitor Centre and we are having tablets made so that the operation of the system can be demonstrated to visitors. Hopefully, the instruments will be up and working by the end of the summer.

Finally, and returning to the booklet, a question arises relating to the Severn & Wye Joint Line. I have in my collection a standard Midland pattern fibre tablet (square configuration B) for the section Lydney Town - Tufts Junction. However, the 1923 list shows this section as 'round configuration A' with a note 'countersunk - GWR Pattern'. Incidentally, this section came within the Mangotsfield District. I have a feeling there is more to the Midland's signalling responsibilities on the Severn & Wye than I imagined. More investigation required - I'll add it to my already impossible list. Better still, can anyone enlighten us all on this?