

Memorable Moments with David Piggott

With thanks and affection from Meldreth Station travellers



Kathryn Betts, Editor of Meldreth Matters

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Spot travellers for 06.02 on platform (do they ever see their homes in daylight?). Open door, switch on ticket machine, tell Ely I've arrived (why do they always claim never to have heard of Meldreth?)

07.00 Sell ticket to Ely. Deny ever having heard of it.

07.30 Train to Cambridge delayed. Forced to admit that tomorrow's 07.41 wouldn't be on time if it started now. Sell more tickets.

08.07 On time. Watch as passengers make coronary-inducing dashes for the doors. Sell more tickets. This time in a hurry. Have two styles of transactions; with and without a chat.

08.30 Think up complicated problem to keep company help desk on their toes. Concerned to find they have never heard of Meldreth.

09.00 Cheap tickets start. Culture seekers head for London. Record season ticket sales. Realise that quill pen and ledger would be quicker than our computer system. Must admit

that two fingers may not be enough for a keyboard but do have uses, particularly after a managerial visit.

10.00 Make coffee. Phone King's Cross re. lost property. They've vaguely heard of Meldreth. Lost mobile phone found along with 3,000 others. Phone transport police re. sudden arrival of ladder in garden. They've never heard of Meldreth. Spell L A D D E R slowly for them. Old timer appears to tell me his father was the last station master to live in the house. As he is the fifth person this year to make this claim, I ask how crowded the place was in those days. He tells me how busy the goods yard used to be. That's why it closed I suppose...

11.00 Team arrives to survey station for platform extensions. Display panels and shelter for Cambridge side. Sing "Tell me the old, old story". They assure me it will happen. Resolve to buy new winter coat as Hell is about to freeze over. They admit that they had never heard of Meldreth. Consoled by sale of ticket to Yeovil junction. Call them to ask if they are open on a Sunday. They've never heard of Meldreth. Tell them the passenger is making herself a cup of tea. Sound of hysterical laughter.

12.00 Asked to work on Sunday at Cambridge. Accept as I need practise in ticket selling. Put up new posters. Quick clean of waiting room spraying lots of polish so people think I've worked hard.

13.00 Two French tourists. Explain concept of unpunctuality. They'd never heard of Meldreth either. Them, I forgive. Last trains depart. Passenger appears afterwards. Short shrift given.

13.30 Close doors. 24 minutes now allotted to count up takings for the day.

13.32 Depart.

Can you spot David?



Royston Crow, 10 January 2008

Mr Piggott received his award from Mr Balodis, right, at the station as he had been unable to attend the awards evening.

COMMUTING can be a stressful business, but David Piggott aims to take the strain out of train travel. Mr Piggott, who works at Meldreth railway station, provides tea and coffee for his customers, and has also been known to phone regular travellers at home

Mr Piggott, who works at Meldreth railway station, provides tea and coffee for his customers, and has also been known to phone regular travellers at home to let them know that their trains are running late.

His efforts were highlighted in the recent Royston Business Awards, when he was named as one of the winners in the Outstanding Customer Service category.

Mr Piggott, who has been at Meldreth for nine years, said: "I just try to do my bit.

"One of the joys of working at a small station is that you have time to get to know people and do a few extra things to make their journeys run smoothly.

"I've worked at larger stations such as Hitchin, where this isn't possible."

John Balodis, from the Royston Chamber of Commerce, who organised the business awards, said: "There were so many good candidates when it came to the Outstanding Customer Service Award that we selected three joint winners.

"David received so many positive comments that we felt his work should be recognised," he said. Mr Piggott received his award from Mr Balodis, right, at the station as he had been unable to attend the awards evening.



A short tribute by Faith Raven

The joy of having a human being at Meldreth station has made all the difference to my travels by train. I travel from Shepreth station to London quite often and I am nervous about using the ticket machine at Shepreth Station. Last week when I decided to be brave, it was not working so along I went to Meldreth Station. David wasn't there that day and I realised how much I am going to miss him. He has been so kind and takes much trouble about giving me the right kind of ticket. Even when there is a queue of people waiting to be served, he is patient. I wish him much happiness in his retirement.



Libby Mitchell

Some Spanish friends were staying with us for the weekend and wanted to go into London on the train. They bought their travel cards from David, which they were able to do easily because he spoke to them in perfect Spanish. They then crossed over the bridge to await the train and David very kindly made the announcements over the tannoy system in English and then in Spanish. Our friends were delighted and it made them feel very much at ease.

Another Spanish guest of ours bought a ticket to London at Meldreth station and commented that David spoke a far more cultured Spanish than most people from his town in Spain.

I will miss David's helpfulness and wonderful use of language. When buying an earlier ticket to London than usual one morning, I explained that I had to be in Holborn to meet one of my sons to hand over something he needed for work that day. 'Ah,' said David. 'An errand of mercy.'

Liz Chapman

As a fairly new regular rail user I don't have any particular stories of David's service at the station over the years but would just like to say 'thank you' to him.

I rarely travelled by train until I retired so have only known David for a few years. I would like to thank him for his unfailingly helpful advice on the best routes, the best value tickets and the best times to travel using, as he always called it, my 'Mature Lady's Railcard'! And, after a walk over from Melbourn on a hot day, his glass of iced water was a life-saver! I cannot imagine anywhere else with a more thoughtful Station Master.

David has always been so polite, courteous and helpful, even though with train delays and cancellations over the years life in the office must have been quite stressful at times.

Meldreth Station will never be quite the same without David, and I would like to wish him well in his retirement.





David in the Meldreth Frolics in 2011. He was performing two of the monologues by Billy Bennett: 'Christmas Day in the Cookhouse' and 'My Mother Doesn't Know I'm on the Stage'. As would be expected he performed them exceptionally well and was very well received.

Thomas Preston

I'll always remember the great effort David made to go the extra mile so fondly: on a hot day he'd bring out water with ice and lemon, on a cold day he'd bring out tea, and if the train was delayed he'd call you at home. Whenever I saw him cycling by, usually in a pink polo shirt, I'd always be so proud to tell people, 'That's my station master, what a legend'.



Meldreth and Melbourn local historians provided this montage for the station waiting room

Peter Draper

David, there can be few within the rail industry who have understood the idiosyncrasies of its timetables as well as you. It always seemed painful to you to have to sell a full price ticket at peak times and you clearly relished finding a cheaper way if you possible could, such as taking a ticket to just beyond a given limit from where there was a much cheaper fare available. You managed to find me a ticket from mid Wales back to Meldreth for £7.50 (with 'badge of maturity' discount). Like so many others I have benefitted from your morning calls warning of delays and cancellations, as well as your encouraging updates on the progress of trains while waiting at the station. I must also say that encountering you at the station could also be a challenge when you were working on one of your Mastermind warm-ups. Which is the smallest cathedral? I would be asked while still half awake, or who was the architect of such and such a building? On occasions I had to exercise my option to 'ask a friend' in order to gain time.

A French friend staying with us a few years ago went down to the station to enquire about trains and came back completely amazed that at a village station he found someone in the ticket office reading a book in Spanish and able to converse in fluent French! You will be greatly missed, David, having kept the station such an integral part of the village for so long. We shall not look upon (your) like again. [I am sure you will recognise the (mis)quote]. Thank you for all that you have contributed and every good wish for your retirement.



The lucky Quiz Night table

Shantanu Majumdar

David Piggott was definitely Meldreth's "Stationmaster", whatever tawdry title the train company may have given him. He used to telephone me at home in the mornings to warn me of disruption to the train which he thought that I *might* be planning to get and at other times was ready with the consolatory tea or coffee when, as not infrequently happened, I missed the train.

But so much more than a stationmaster, a polymath able to quote Sir Thomas Beecham or Dr Johnson as swiftly as he could switch to speaking fluent Spanish or French to a foreign passenger.

I hope that a long and happy retirement beckons. He is neither replaced nor replaceable.

Rosamund Rhodes-Kemp

This is very sad news as I have been commuting for 23 years and although not often from Meldreth I have always found David to provide service above and beyond at every occasion and have envied those lucky enough to go via Meldreth as stories of his assistance to those lucky enough to do so are legendary. It will not be the same without him. Fortunately I shall still see David at Church. A huge loss to many.



Lynn Travis

John and I always laugh when David asks us for our "badge of maturity" (senior rail pass) and quotes Greek or Latin phrases. He is such a fount of knowledge at the fund-raising quizzes.

Ticket office closure claims quashed

[By Ewan Foskett](#) Thursday, September 15, 2011

2.41 PM

TRAIN operator First Capital Connect (FCC) has quashed fears that ticket offices at its stations will be permanently closed.

The Crow last week revealed that Ashwell and Morden and Meldreth stations were earmarked for the permanent closure of their ticket offices in a Government report prepared by Sir Roy McNulty.

A spokesman for the Department for Transport said the findings of Sir Roy's report will be examined as part of a Government review, with a detailed response expected next month.

But FCC has now written to staff, explaining that the train company intends to ignore Government advice if it concludes that ticket offices should be closed.

A company spokesman said: "We have absolutely no plans to close any ticket offices at First Capital Connect stations.

"It's a report that's looking generally across the whole country.

"We have reassured our staff because the way the report has been written has the potential to be quite alarming to our staff."

Rail users and commuters had already slammed the suggestion – with many praising the hard work of Meldreth's station master.

One passenger, a teacher, who did not want to be named, said: "We have a wonderful station master and it would be more difficult without him."

Another Melbourn commuter who travels daily to London also praised the station master and said rail users would suffer without a manned ticket office.

"It would be terrible. He's brilliant in there – he is fantastic," said Francis Desmarais.

"My train was a half-an-hour late and he came out and made me a cup of tea. He would be greatly missed."

Others also praised the assistance provided by members of staff.

County councillor Susan van de Ven, chairman of the Meldreth, Shepreth and Foxton Rail Users Group, said FCC had been in contact and reassured her that Meldreth station would not close.

“I have had two conversations with First Capital Connect and they confirmed there are no plans to close Meldreth station office,” she said.



Waiting for the next train – David Piggott, WAGN’s one man in Meldreth in 2001.

John Crawforth

This is very much the end of an era - travelling to and fro from Meldreth station just won't be the same again, will it?

I remember the first time I encountered him, shortly after we arrived here in the summer of 2013. As we stood on the platform on a hot morning he announced over the tannoy that 'the train from Royston is a glimmer of light in the mid distance'! I knew from then on we were in for a treat.

He never wanted to see your senior railcard, preferring to ask (with a twinkle in his eye) for your 'emblem of maturity'! He has always been kind, too, to our train-obsessed grandson (just 3) who regularly persuades us to go to the station so he can watch the trains go by. He knows David by name now and is always disappointed if he finds someone else on duty.



David with Keith Jipps from First Capital Connect, receiving a company award.

The Walston Family

We are so sorry to see David retire. He was already something of a legendary figure when we moved into the village over 20 years ago. Commuters spoke of the wonderful stationmaster who would telephone his regulars at home to let them know their train was delayed.

Off duty, no village quiz was safe from his fearsome erudition, which even led him to appear unexpectedly in our living room doing battle with the black armchair on Mastermind. His specialist subject on that occasion was Guadeloupe so I was not surprised when he ably assisted our French visitors in fluent and gracious French. I was still more impressed to find his linguistic abilities extended to Spanish as well when I heard him passing the time of day with the Spanish mother of one of my son's classmates.

He always made every effort to provide all of us with information on train services and to ensure that we got the best deal. Most defining of his extraordinary care for his customers, for me, was the cold and rainy day when, not unusually for either of them, my daughter missed her train and David cheered her up with a cup of tea. On hot days, he was always ready with a glass of water. In these times of cost-cutting and impersonal automation, he will be very much missed. Thank you, David.





Another happy station gardening session

Vernon Gamon

I used to catch the 07:09 train from Meldreth to London some years ago and David knew me as a “regular”. When disruption occasionally hit the service, David would phone me at home to tell me what was happening and what alternatives I may have. This was entirely his own initiative and was really appreciated as a generous and thoughtful act for my benefit alone - way beyond the call of duty! I am sure he did it for several other customers as well.

Following my retirement from full-time work in London, I became a domestic plumber, advertising my services for bathroom and kitchen refurbishments in the local parish magazines. David contacted me and we agreed for me to refit his kitchen, the result of which he was very pleased with. So I ended up also refitting his bathroom as well, to which he said “WOW” when he saw it. We had a delightful working relationship throughout.

Unfortunately we will not be able to join you at the station for tea with David on the 12th December. We would just like to thank him for all the many years he has been at Meldreth and for the service he has always given to railway users. We don't know of any other person who provides refreshments when a train is late or while waiting for the bus when engineering works are taking place on the line.



Janet & Stephen Greeves

David will be a hard act to follow.
With best wishes for his retirement.

Kate French

Not sure if this is unique but it always made me smile whilst waiting for the early morning train.

Whenever there was planned engineering work at the weekend, David would always announce over the platform speakers:

"If anyone is thinking of travelling into London this weekend, please pop into the ticket office and I will talk you out of it!"

He will be missed.



Joe Cottrell

David is a real fixture in the village, as recognisable as the school or the village hall. He turned a train journey from a chore to a pleasure.

I have two very fond memories of him, firstly on a very snowy, blustery day in February when an avalanche of snow fell and all the trains had stopped running. David made us hot tea and gave us biscuits, and chatted about the general uselessness of First Capital Connect on days when it snowed.

Secondly, I remember one day I was trying to buy a ticket from Meldreth to Cambridge and the ticket machine was being very disagreeable. I grew more and more irate as each attempt to buy a ticket was foiled. After some expletives and raised voices on my part, I hear David's voice through the closed office door, "Just be patient with it! Getting angry won't help!"

He was a great advert for train travel, he'll be sorely missed.



Spot the tea tray?

Maeta Mackenzie

Some years ago, I travelled to Cambridge and on the spur of the moment, treated myself to two small items of new clothes in a sale. Returning triumphant to Meldreth station I descended from the train, and as it was pulling away realised that I had left my bag of purchases on the seat.

I told my tale to David expecting that I would have to go to a lost property office in London? David immediately went into action, and sent a fiery cross to stations down the line towards London, alerting them to an unattended transparent plastic bag travelling unaccompanied on public transport and assuring them it was not a bomb. The next day I was able to go round to the station and collect it as it had been turned round and found its way home. Thus, David added another string to his bow, namely lost property services!

All the best for a happy retirement.



Belinda and Nigel Brown

Commuting from Meldreth station will now take on a new meaning with the retirement of the familiar face of David every morning. We cannot thank him enough for his dedicated and caring service to this small community station which has become much busier in recent years during commuting times, for his cheery and witty comments which always brought a smile to us whilst standing waiting for our trains, no matter what the issue at hand. Human kindness is what springs to mind when we think of David and generosity of spirit. The small world of our daily commute was made brighter and more friendly because of his familiar presence every day.

David has felt part of our 'unusual' family at the station, for those of us who meet only for a few minutes every day before work or sometimes afterwards. Because of this we feel endeavouring familiarity with the gentle soul behind the counter greeting us every morning. Your presence will be sorely missed David but rest assured you have made a difference and we look forward to seeing you around the villages enjoying some relaxing time at social events.

Very best wishes.



Meldreth Primary School and Melbourn Village College students, and the School Garden sign

Vivienne (Mrs) Brown

The Scene: Winter. The path across the field to Meldreth Station Platform 1. Weekday, around 7.13am. Pitch black. A woman is perhaps 10 steps away from the staircase upto the platform. She sees the train is on the approach to the station. Blesses whichever lucky star got her here in time to board the train before it departs.

Ghostly voice from the darkness: MRS BROWN; IF YOU'RE OUT THERE, THE 7.13 IS ABOUT TO PULL INTO THE STATION. IF YOU'RE ON THE PATH, RUN!

Who else but David would not only know pretty well precisely where each and every season-ticket holder would be by when, but also care enough to bellow into the ether just to make sure that person caught their train? Who else would take our phone numbers so that he could let us know if the train was delayed or cancelled? Who else would keep a look-out for us at the station so that he could tell us the new timetable was in? So many memorable moments...

David, it will never be the same without you. I am just grateful I stopped commuting before you retired. You have improved countless numbers of people's commuting lives over the years; may you have a long and happy retirement. You have certainly earned it. All best wishes.



Rosemary Childerley

Over the past 16 years we have had an exceptionally kind, caring and intelligent man, David Piggott, in our ticket office. The following is a list of the special services he has given to our friends, family and David, my husband and I.

My son and daughter in law were both early morning commuters to London for a while. If time allowed he would always ring them if trains were cancelled or running very late. In the winter, there was always a kettle, with tea, coffee and milk in the waiting room so passengers could make themselves a hot drink if needed, all free!

In the summer when he had finished selling tickets he would walk up the platform offering iced drinks when it was very hot.

People would drive to Meldreth from surrounding towns and villages to book special tickets and get his valuable advice. A disabled friend in her mid -80s drove from Fulbourn to Meldreth early this year to get David to sort out her journey from Cambridge to Horsham so she could visit her sister. He arranged wheelchairs and carers to put her on the right trains and meet her when she got off. Also a taxi to take her to the connecting station. It all went without a hitch and she was so delighted she still talks about it.

My own special thanks go to David when in 2004 he sorted out our journey to a wedding in a remote place in Northumberland very near Hadrian's Wall. I presumed we'd go to Newcastle and then have to use local buses or a taxi. He paused for a few seconds and then said he would check but thought it was on a line Dr. Beeching forgot to axe. He was quite right so we had a very enjoyable and stress less trip.

He is so very talented too, speaking excellent Spanish which he always used with my bilingual Spanish daughter in law. When time allowed she was very impressed when he recited Medieval Spanish poems to her.

He soon knew all his regulars and we felt he was a friend as well as the Station Master. We will miss his patient, cheerful greetings from behind the glass panel and wish him a long, healthy and happy retirement.





Meldreth School Gardening Club, getting the station garden started

Johan van de Ven

I will always remember David as a friendly face at the station, always taking a personal interest in his customers and always ready to go the extra mile - whether this meant finding ways to make tickets cheaper or passing round cups of water on a hot summer's day.



Posting our petition with more than 1000 signatures to keep David's booking office open

Susan van de Ven

Once I went to buy a ticket at lunchtime, before First Capital Connect reduced the booking office open hours and David was there until just after 1PM on weekdays. I deliberately picked a quiet time between trains. When I peeked through the glass to see if David was there, I found he was just about to sit down for lunch. A small table was set in the ticket office complete with red checked table cloth, napkin and cutlery set down elegantly, and a china plate with a bottle of tomato ketchup next to it. I felt badly that I was interrupting David just as he was about to tuck in but he popped right up in his usual way and got me sorted.

Because of my American accent he always assumed that I would be able to provide instant insight into Mastermind Quiz questions that involved American history or geography. At first I got away without knowing the answers but eventually it must have become obvious to him that I was completely unhelpful.

When the booking office came under threat, a petition was set up to save the Saturday service. It was obvious that much of the strength of feeling that poured forth had to do with the way David ran the service. At the packed public meeting, with the TV crews filming away, affection for David was palpable and the First Capital Connect boss in attendance was clearly aware of this. No doubt, that was the magic ingredient in keeping our Saturday service and protecting the booking office. We intend to carry on David's legacy!

After that we set up the Rail User Group. Moving on from protest we immediately turned to creating a station garden and installing flower tubs on the platforms. The garden first had to be dug out and David kept us labourers well-watered with tea and coffee, naturally. The dig turned out to have archaeological merit as a pair of black lace knickers was unearthed. This had been the site of the Station Master's garden in years long gone, and David got a great laugh out of the colourful legacy now revealed.



Jackie & John Rogger

Whenever I wished to visit a good friend of mine in Birmingham, David would find me the most reasonably priced fare & give me several options. On one occasion he said, 'you can take the something o' clock train from Euston at a certain price or leave half an hour later & be able to treat yourself to a gin & tonic for the fare difference!'

On my return, I gave him - much to his surprise & amusement - a can of gin & tonic as a reward!

On a snowy winters morning – when yet another dental appointment in Kings Lynn was necessary - there were the inevitable delays on the line. However, there was the cosy waiting room, David's friendly face plus his subtle sense of humour & the added treat of a steaming cup of tea or coffee, with books to read from his little library.

This is what always made travel in Meldreth so special & David was such a big part of this. You will never be forgotten & go down in the history of this village. Good luck with your retirement but we will miss you!



Beverley Cottrell

David is one in a million. There are so many stories I could tell about what makes him unique, but these three will have to suffice:

Firstly, when the new school year starts, David goes up and down the platform with a clip-board, asking the students to write down their names and telephone numbers and the train they usually catch to get into Cambridge. When the train is late, he telephones each student to let them know of the delay. I remember being somewhat taken aback one morning when the phone rang and a friendly voice said "Tell Joe he can have another cup of tea. The train is 18 minutes late".

Secondly, one very hot day I found myself on the platform with an empty water bottle. I asked David if I could use his little kitchen to fill it up. "I'll do it for you", was his obliging response. He seemed to be taking a very long time, but when he finally emerged, the bottle was filled not only with water but also with ice cubes.

Thirdly, and most impressively, one day I was waiting to catch the train to London. A well-dressed couple was also waiting, looking a little uncertain. David appeared and addressed them from the opposite platform, telling them in fluent Italian that when they got to Kings' Cross, they had to cross the road and go to St Pancras station to catch the Eurostar. You've been fantastic, David, and we will miss you hugely.





David's train company colleague Andy Hart second from left. Lunch after gardening.

Margaret Goddin

David is a Meldreth treasure. When our son Tom commuted from Meldreth to Cambridge for school it was not unusual for our phone to ring at around 7a.m. to inform us that the train was delayed and therefore Tom could have extra time in bed or enjoy a cooked breakfast. What a service! He will be greatly missed by all the residents in Meldreth as absolutely nothing was too much trouble for him. We wish him a well-deserved and very happy retirement.



William Bains

Everyone must remember David's cheerful voice telling us the next train was at Royston or Shepreth. Sometimes he went far further. I remember when our children were going to secondary school on the train, a couple of times David telephoned us at home to say there was some major disruption in the winter service, and we should either hurry over or stay home to avoid a long, cold wait on the platform. It was service way above his duties, and we were very grateful.

Derek van de Ven

I had gone in to ask David a question about getting a discount for a trip I was going to take later on. Dave hadn't been able to provide an answer he was happy with. After I went out on the platform he called me on the loudspeaker saying, 'Mr van de Ven, it's come to me!' and summoned me back into the office.

I remember one of those really snowy days. David had a group of commuters around him and he was entertaining them very well. They absolutely loved hearing his jokes.

He brought round water on hot days, with a slice of lemon in each cup. An all-round nice guy.

Maggie MacDonald

My recollections of David:

My goodness we shall miss him. Many is the time he has found the most economic route for one of our student girls to travel half way across England on a student budget. Many is the time he would 'phone to enable me to have an extra slice of toast because the 7.11am train to Kings Cross was delayed.

Then there were those recuperative cups of tea when realisation set in that the delayed train was going to be a long time coming!!

Imagine the absolute amazement and sheer delight when one chilly morning a group of teenage boys were offered a tray of bread, marg, jam and hot tea. They were enchanted by David's generosity and kindness and devoured their booty with great relish.



Melbourn Village College students from Melbourn and Meldreth, helping with a tidy-up



What a difference it makes!

Tim and Joan Gane

We would like to wish you well in your retirement David. For the last 10 years in early December we have struggled into the waiting room with a decorated Christmas tree when it was cold and miserable to bring some Christmas cheer for the passengers. You would always have a little joke with us about being that time of the year again. Of course we were not allowed lights on the tree, due to Health and Safety!

One little story that must be told 'was on a cold early morning a couple were parting company on the station. One was a local and the other was Italian. You heard him speaking Italian and brought out 2 steaming cups of hot chocolate and spoke to him in fluent Italian. He was so impressed.' What an ambassador you were for our Country.

In the 1998/9 you came to the Meldreth Village Association Quiz nights with 2 friends and would have a table for 3 instead of 8 and win 8 bottles of wine every year for a few years. We had to put a stop to that!

Thank you also for telephoning us to say when it was the right time to buy the best price ticket.

We will miss you but hope to still see you around Melbourn and Meldreth.



Merry Christmas, David!

12 December 2015



Thank you, David!

