

March 2001

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Thoughts of Chairman Dell

By the time you read this (if you do read it) it will be March and we should have the worst of the winter weather over and we can look forward to walking on grass that doesn't resemble a battlefield. As I watch our hardy volunteers on a Sunday morning making for home after a hard morning's effort I am reminded of Napoleon's retreat from Moscow – soaked through, muddy and tired but still determined to carry on and continue the fight next Sunday.

Also coming up fast is the AGM in May. Get your nominations in early so everyone gets to know you and your intentions. It's quite interesting being an officer or Council member for the Society. Don't let the fact that Tony Dunbar had a shock of black hair and that Peter Precious could hear a pin drop at 100yds. I myself was quite handsome and debonair but alas Council work has taken its toll. No it's not as bad as that and I am sure if you stand you will find it both interesting and rewarding.

Our Treasurer has told me that all the revenue earning Sections of the Society (God bless 'em) have returned accounts except the Fetes Section. Come on Tim Joiner. We haven't heard from you for so long. Also, we would like to hear from you or any of the other 26 founding members of the Section of any plans for the coming year. We are interested in the Fetes Section but it seems to have turned into a secret society.

The News Sheet gets better and better (just making sure you get publishing). February was particularly good with plenty of variety. Roger Bell gives us very good reports each month (an unsung hero!) and this month we even had poetry from JJS (whoever he is). We had snippets from the past via a St Albans member to Mike Collingwood (circa 1949) – most interesting - even the adverts. I was interested to see Henry Henley who was a founder member of the NLSME was mentioned in the paper cutting. His daughter lives opposite me and gave me her father's loco, a very nice Canterbury Lamb, which now sits on a shelf in my lounge. She gave it to me for me to be custodian of. When she visits she always remarks that it looks much nicer on my shelf than up in her loft. Thankyou June – much appreciated. As for the article by Bryan Webster on his trip to Poland, I envy him very much. Fancy being in control of such a monster as a full size mainline locomotive. It all seemed well laid back and happy. I'm sure our friends in the EU will soon put a stop to all the enjoyment before too long.`

The Garden Railway continues to progress. Last Sunday (4th Feb) we cast the bridge. We will have to leave the shuttering on for at least a fortnight so we wont see the results

until then. I'm sure it will remain quite solid. Ron Todd says it will and I believe him. We have a very good team on the project: John 'the tools' Squire, Ron 'I can build anything' Todd, John 'I can put anything out' West, Sam 'I'm getting better all the time' Skuse and lastly Frank 'I worry quite a lot' Dell. And Peter Badger pays us a visit as does Dick Payne.

If you are spare at any time do pay us a visit as the next job is a big one – to paint wood preserver on all the timber. See you all on Sunday.

Frank Dell

Marine Mutterings

For the March meeting we have Ron Evans coming to talk about his experiences modelling some of the more important historic submarines. This should be a very interesting evening – so don't miss it! After the March meeting we transfer our activities to Colney Heath.

We still hope to have some Summer events organised in time for publication in the next News Sheet – sorry that we have not yet got them sorted. The plan is to have a couple of 'open' days when we invite some other Societies and run a steering regatta with the emphasis on enjoyment rather than fierce competition. Any ideas for other Summer events would be very welcome and the subject will be discussed at the March meeting before the talk commences.

There is not too much to report on the Colney Heath activities. The weather has slowed things down and may mean that some of the work will have to continue during the boating season. Between the periods of heavy rain we actually had a session when the ground was frozen. So far we have finished two of the three proposed paved areas and hope to have the third finished by the time you read this.

Do not forget the March Meeting.

Happy boating

Bernard Lambert

Stationary Steam and Traction Engine Section News

After the rather wet summer the two winter activities of the SS & TE have been blessed with sunshine; some of you may remember this phenomenon. Ron Todd, Alex and Mark James, Dick Heskith and myself ran rides in the car park outside the British Aerospace Railway Club exhibition. A pair of Burrells doing a good job and everyone enjoying themselves.

The Annual London New Years Day parade had seven miniature traction engines, five 4" and two 3" and was run in bright sunshine for the third year running. The NLSME was represented by Terry, Lynn and Jenny Baxter with their Maclaren; Terry's engine is now sign written "T Baxter & Daughter". Ron Todd had Alex and Mark James to assist with

his Burrell twin crank compound. He had some water feed troubles but triumphed over all problems. John Squire, Robbei Squire, Peter Badger, Pat Badger and Jack Badger, two wagons, 20 gallons of water, one bag of coal, food and drink, spare warm cloths, a large box of tools and a splendid flashing yellow beacon were hauled by a smallish single cylinder Burrell. Ms Squire stayed at home to cook our supper and keep the central heating company. As before the high point was the return trip from Piccadilly to the Vauxhall bridge in normal traffic via Hyde Park corner.

We all enjoyed ourselves and as they all ran so well, so I suspect did all the engines.

John Squire

Garden Railway News

BEING THE PROGRESS AND THOUGHTS OF THE NEW NLSME MUCH SMALLER LOCO SECTION!

The new garden railway is progressing well. As at 21st Jan the main circuit structure and track base is complete, the 0 gauge single line circuit is under construction with the materials to hand and the main circuit access bridge is also under construction.

We have been asked why we have not made a landscaped railway like the very nice narrow gauge garden railway at Guildford SME.

Our track is designed to enable maximum access by our members, so that they can operate trains in either of two gauges and in a multitude of scales and loading gauges. Hopefully it will accommodate 7mm, 10mm, 16mm scales and American Gauge 1 and narrow gauge locos. Perhaps most important of all, it will provide a suitable railway for our junior members to run their Mamod engines on. All this means that landscaping becomes a problem; we need to allow for free steamers, which require ease of access, as well as radio-controlled locos that can be operated from a distance. As we must be able to run a gauge one "Duchess" at 90m.p.h, a 20:1 Shay at 5 m.p.h. and a 16mm scale 2'Garrett at 25 m.p.h., we have elected for a simple 140' circuit with ample clearances and the maximum radii that the site will allow. We have set the track height 3' above the ground in order to eliminate wet knees and for ease of access for those with bad backs. So we will rely on the very pleasant rural setting for our landscape and in due course will grow a hedge under the track, hiding the supports and making the whole thing blend into its natural background.

At present there are no plans to electrify the track which is intended primarily for live steam running and battery powered locos, but this is not written in stone and any keen electrically literate member has but to put his plan forward.

In a purely model engineering sense we are hoping that the existence of this track will encourage our members to construct some of the numerous Gauge 1 loco designs. Remember a coal fired Gauge 1 engine can be built in a year and carried in a box under your arm.

We hope that it will be an additional source of fun at Colney Heath, which members will enjoy.

John Squire

[Tyttenhanger Gazette](#)

The topic for the February Loco meeting was a talk by Stuart Vousden on his career with the full size railway. Like so many young lads of his day he was a loco spotter. After his first job in a factory and when he was old enough he started at Kings Cross as a cleaner. The Deltics were kept immaculate with oil and paraffin. After a course as a fireman he was able to take locomotives to Hitchin Depot and bring another one back to Kings Cross. As steam began to run out he went to Cricklewood where the yard was full of Black Fives and 9Fs. Starting again as a cleaner, as one had to, within half an hour he had passed his firing exam and was out on the road within a week. He was soon firing Flying Scotsman in its preserved state with two tenders. Having finished tea on the footplate Stuart emptied the tea billy can in usual BR form, off the footplate. Mr Peglar remarked "Well done" so Stuart was left to clean up the side of the tender.

Many amusing tales were heard. Whilst on the Midland main line he teamed up with a driver who was noted for being scruffy and who stank. However he was a good driver. They were bound for St Pancras and at the outset he said, "When we stop, put the brake on." Stuart could not understand what he meant. They had a good run into the Terminus and as the loco slowed towards the buffers, the driver jumped of and ran down the platform. Stuart thought for a second, "Did he mean I was to cross to the other side of the cab and apply the brake?" He reached for it and as the train came to a halt he could see the driver waving to him from the bar enjoying his pint and beckoning Stuart to come for his.

He used to enjoy standing on the footplate with his cap distorted into an acceptable shape perched on his head whilst looking down on the crowds leaving the train, hoping to catch the eye of an attractive girl from his footplate of power. But none seemed to look up.

After a break from the railway he joined the Severn Valley preserved line and after that the Bluebell Line. Anxious to do some firing he took one of Clive Groom's Footplate Days and Ways on the Bluebell which he found brilliant. He then went to Swanage on the preserved line and once again had to start as a cleaner. This was when the Railway was in its infancy. It had some small engines – a 1F and an industrial saddle tank. The line from Swanage is uphill all the way. With a tiny engine hauling three coaches they would often have to stop for a blow-up. The preserved line firemen wanted to save coal by not having a big fire and just had a few lumps so the firebars could be seen. Opening the regulator caused most of the fire to disappear and it would often mean having to stop again. Stuart built up a good deep fire on one run and climbed out of Swanage without touching the fire until near the top of the incline. This was the type of economy he preferred.

A diary noted all the engines he had worked on and comments about them. One, a T9 had a large tender with coal over its length. Whilst running in reverse this caused coal dust to get in ones eyes. The regulator when open would get too hot to touch from the fire-hole door. Some photographs were projected onto the screen, one from a cab looking forwards into clouds of smoke making it almost impossible to see any signals. This was what smoke deflectors were for – to direct smoke away.

One useful gauge to be found on some locos was the steam chest pressure gauge. It was

handy when backing up to a train. Whilst reversing speed was more easily judged by looking out from the side of the loco than looking over the top of the tender.

Stuart's humour held an attentive audience and we thanked him for an enjoyable evening.

Picketts Lock

At the close of the Model Engineering Exhibition at Picketts Lock the trade and the clubs met the organiser to discuss plans for next year's event which will be held at Wembley. There will be 1000 car parking spaces. Aircraft and boats will also be included although flying will not be possible and a boating pool will not be provided the first year there. The dates are to be confirmed. The exhibition will otherwise be as this year but larger. The hall at Picketts Lock will be pulled down.

By Roger Bell

Spotlight on George Case

George has been a well known member of our Society for more than 20 years and reminiscences of his working life have been published in more than one book in the past. The following is a transcript of one of the chapters of a book called 'Tales of the Old Railwaymen' by Tom Quinn. It is published by David and Charles (1998 ISBN 0715305441) and contains a large number of different stories from railway men. Indeed, George was instrumental in putting the publishers in touch with several of his inspectors who are featured in the book. It's an excellent volume, complete with illustrations and is highly recommended. George's chapter is entitled 'High Days at Holloway'.

I used to sing to Ribbentrop, Goering and Goebbels', says former signalman George Case with a grin. 'They came to Potters Bar as foreign dignitaries before the war when I was at school. They came each November for a service at St Mary's Church, Potters Bar, to pay homage to the Zeppelin crews shot down in the vicinity during the First World War!'

Surrounded by beautiful, large-scale model steam trains, George still lives in Potters Bar where he has spent most of his life. But he was born just a few miles away at Finsbury Park on the outskirts of London: 'I think we're an old Potters Bar family,' he says proudly, 'my father was born and lived all his life here.'

And railway work runs deep in the Case family. George's father was a guard for forty-five years – he started in 1917 – and his grandfather worked as a platelayer; George still has his father's NUR card for 1918. He can remember family stories of the perils of Victorian days on the railway: 'it was a rough old job being on fogging duty in those days; my grandfather had to stand there for hours on end in the freezing cold with his flags and lamps so the drivers had some idea what was going on.' Tragically he was killed in Hadley Wood Tunnel whilst on fogging duty in 1918.

It might seem that, with so long a family connection with the railway, George's career choice would have been virtually made for him, but it was actually a little more complicated than that, as he explains:

‘I wanted to go in the Navy, but my dad said “No”, and my mum said she didn’t want me on the railways. After that I did start to get interested in trains; in fact, I was eventually so interested that I used to sneak off from school up to Holloway North Up signal cabin, one of the biggest cabins in London, to see if I could find out how the whole thing worked. I was mad keen to learn signals, but I wasn’t quite fourteen then and I was supposed to be at school – though I suppose my dad was quite good about it in the end. When he found out I’d been learning semaphore he got me a semaphore instrument, and he’d sit downstairs while I sat upstairs in my bedroom, and we’d send signals back and forth. We had great fun, but I also learned a lot.’

By this time the war had started, so George decided he’d join the railways; and after the time he had spent learning semaphore at home he was now committed to a career as a signalman:

‘I went down to Holloway yardmasters office. In those days you had to replace someone to get a job; in other words, if someone wanted to leave the railway, or if they were joining the Army, you could take their place. If they couldn’t find someone they couldn’t leave. A mate of mine wanted to go into the Air Force so I jumped at the chance to replace him as telegraph lad, which is exactly how my dad had started. I got a reference from the vicar at Potters Bar and a school reference. As a matter of interest my mate Leslie, the chap whose job I was to take, distinguished himself by being the first RAF man to shoot down a Messerschmitt 109E, a plane that the British authorities were desperate to get a look at.’

George’s father only realised that his son had left school after George had already been at work for a month – the school board man called at the house and the game was up.

‘He was furious when he found out,’ says George. ‘He made me go back to school till I was legally allowed to leave and start work, which was on my fourteenth birthday, 14 November 1940. This meant going back for only a short time, however, and as soon as I could I went back to be a lad messenger. I started each day at 8:30am at Finsbury Park, and I had to go down to all the platelayers’ cabin and signal cabins to pick up the mail for the yardmaster. I was a small boy and I had to carry a huge bag back and forth across the main lines – can you imagine being allowed to do that today! There were seven sets of lines and you just had to keep an eye out for trains. If it was foggy they’d detail someone from the shunters’ yard to see you across the rails. Once I’d collected all the mail I’d taken it to the yardmaster’s office and open it ready for the chief clerk who would arrive about 9:00am.’

The lad messenger was without question at the bottom on the pile, but as he dashed between various people doing different jobs George gained an insight into how all the parts of the railway worked. Apart from sorting out the post he had to look after the stores: ‘I can remember taking massive blocks of soap out and cutting off huge chunks to cart to the various cabins. Then I had to deal with applications for private passes – these were reduced-fare tickets for railwaymen to travel. This was the London North Eastern (LNER) region so our forms were white.

‘At 10:30am I had to make tea for the entire office staff, then I’d run messages for all and sundry. I even had to measure up the railwaymen for their uniforms – it must have been a funny sight. There I was, a little lad of fourteen or fifteen, putting the tape measure round these huge men. All the railway uniforms at that date were supplied by Lotteries of Liverpool Street.’

Inevitably, as the newest and youngest recruit, George had to put up with a lot of

practical jokes. He remembers being asked to get red oil for some lamps and green oil for others, and of course he fell for it and spent long periods looking for things that didn't exist. But occasionally the jokes backfired:

'I remember in my very early days going across the tracks to the platelayers' cabin at Holloway to see Mr Hudson, also known as Soapy. When I got there he said "Casey." – they all called me Casey – "I want a privilege ticket. I want to go to Delhi". I said, "Do you mean Delhi in India?" and when he said "yes", I believed him. I just said, "On, that'll be the pink form as it's outside our region". I asked him what route he wanted to take and everything – I don't know how he kept a straight face. Anyway, I made out the appropriate form and that afternoon the form went into the yardmaster's box.

'A short while later I heard the bell ringing violently to tell me that the guvn'r wanted me. He was a Mr Keys and I always remember how he wore a pince-nez on the end of his nose.

"Case," he said

"Yes sir," I said

"This application form from Mr Hudson."

"Yes, sir. His old aunt is sick and he wants to visit her," I said

"Think you'd better get Hudson," he said

'So I set off across the rails to the platelayers' cabin and found Hudson, who was a very big man, busy playing cards.

I said "Mr Keys wants to see you."

"What the bloody hell does he want," roared Hudson

"It's about your privilege pass to Delhi."

"You haven't filled it out, have you, you silly bugger!"

'I could hear all sorts of bellowing from Mr Key's office after Hudson went in, and he came out looking very sheepish. There were no more tricks like that afterwards.'

When George started work even a boy of fourteen was expected to do a forty-eight hour week. Each day finished at 5pm weekdays, and at noon on Saturdays, with half an hour for lunch. Occasionally George, like the other workers would finish at ten past the hour, or ten to – 'I'm buggered if I can remember why!' he says.

George worked as a messenger boy for a total of only six months; during the war years, job changing and even promotion was far easier than it had been before the war, simply because of the shortage of men. 'I got myself a new job, but in the usual way of the time I had to get a replacement for my old job before I could move on. I was lucky, because I managed to get a friend called Mo Kantor to take my place as a messenger boy. His dad was a furrier in Potters Bar and though you might have thought he'd have followed in his father's footsteps, he joined me on the railways. I taught him everything I knew in the messenger boy line, and then became a telegraph lad at Holloway, South Down Cabin.'

George's first wage packet contained just 14s 6d but 2d of that disappeared immediately into what was then called the 'Lloyd George', an early unemployment tax. Despite getting himself a new job with extra responsibilities, George had to accept that he was not going to receive any more money. The rule on the railway was that you didn't get a pay rise, whatever you were doing, until your next birthday. Thereafter at each birthday you received a further 1s rise.

'They had a terrible initiation ceremony for all new entrants,' remembers George.

'They'd grab you when you went in the platelayers' cabin, sharpen a cut-throat razor

right in front of you, and make it really look like they were going to cut your privates off!' However, having survived the perils of the platelayers' cabin intact, George was subsequently amazed to discover how much responsibility a fourteen-year-old was expected to cope with:

'You went straight into a signals cabin where you learned to fill in the train registration book. In a busy box you'd have 4 pages of booking per shift: each line of entry in the book had 10 items that had to be filled in – the time the train was offered, the time it was accepted, time passed on, time passing in the rear and so on. It worked out at 10 items per line, 40 lines per page: a total of 400 items per page, and there were 4 pages each shift!

'That was a hell of a lot of entries for a young lad. At the Holloway signal cabin I did 6am to 2pm and 2pm to 10pm shifts. You had to be there at 6am, and if you were the least bit late they knew straight away because the bookings would not be there, and of course you couldn't add them after the event.'

Despite the heavy workload of the registration book there were other, equally onerous duties. George had to use the telephone, tap out telegraph messages, and once a week get down on his hands and knees to scrub the signalbox floorboards till they were white. The massive metal frame the levers were held in had to be black-leaded every week, too: 'Anyone who has ever done that will know what a filthy job it is. The black-leading used to get everywhere – on your clothes, up your nose, all over your face. But they wanted it to look smart and clean and well looked after, which it did. At Holloway there were fifty levers that had to be polished, too. Signalmen were always proud men, who wanted their cabins to be just right.'

Messages from the signalbox were sent up and down the line via the block bells – basically a brass bell in a mahogany case – and this too, had to be kept sparkingly clean. 'Even the screw heads on all the bits of equipment were polished regularly with Brasso,' says George with a smile 'A good cabin was a gleaming mass of metal, at least as beautifully kept as a cab on a locomotive.'

It was accepted practice that the telegraph lad would operate the levers while the signalman had his breakfast. This was all a bit unofficial, but wasn't difficult, says George, because the signalman was always on hand if you got stuck and it didn't take long, anyway, to become familiar with the way the system worked.

'Mind you, there was a knack to pulling those levers – they weren't power-assisted or anything, so you had to put your weight behind them. Distant signals were more difficult simply because they were farther off – down below the cabin were the rods and linkages that led off up or down the track, and for a signal a good distance away you were moving a lot of metal, although counterbalancing weights were fitted to make things a little easier. Some points were particularly difficult: first you had to unlock them, then get clearance – that is, prove that nothing was on that bit of track – then you had to open the bar-point lock, a lock lever that kept the points where you wanted them. Only then could you go ahead'.

Signalboxes were almost like closed worlds with rules of their own and the signalman and his telegraph lad, if he had one, had to be self-sufficient. There was a stove for heating up tea and even meals, and there were chemical loos..

'The poor old telegraph lad had the job of emptying those too!' says George, 'What a terrible job that was, although at the Holloway box I was lucky because one of the

platelayers used to do it, more often than not. But when I had to do it I had to walk across six or seven sets of track terrified I might slip and terrified I might have to move quick if a train came along and of course moving sharpish was very likely to make you drop the loo. I remember when Chitty Mason, a cattle-truck cleaner at Holloway sidings, was emptying this loo, and he tripped while crossing the tracks; of course the contents of the loo went everywhere – Dusty Day, the signalman I worked for at the time, could hardly operate the leavers he was laughing so much.’

Signalboxes were held strictly to account in the old days; if there was an accident, however minor, the telegraph lad’s entries were checked in the registration book, so everything had to be spot on. The big clock in the cabin was checked every day at 10am, and if it had to be corrected even by half a minute, a note to that effect had to be entered in the book. When a relief signalman came on he would rely heavily on the telegraph boy who usually knew a great deal more about the business of that particular box than the temporary signalman:

‘I remember at Holloway South the relief signalman was George Gunn – he was known as Gun Gun for some reason – an enormous fellow who didn’t like any of the drivers. The drivers all knew this, and to tease him they used to slow down as they passed the box and pretended to shoot him, a sort of reminder of his nickname. It used to infuriate George who would report the drivers. Once, for no particular reason, he told me I’d been cheeky: “Get on your stool and stay on it for the rest of the shift,” he said. So I sat there for a while, and then he went to the back of the box where the big old range provided heat and a place to cook his breakfast. All signalmen cooked their breakfasts in the cabin in those days. He used to have half-a-dozen eggs, half-a-dozen pieces of bacon, sausages, fried bread – you wouldn’t believe anyone could eat so much, he absolutely packed it away. Anyway, on this particular day I think he must have spent a bit longer than usual cooking because by the time he’s started eating, we were into a very busy time; in fact we were suddenly so busy that he asked me to move the points – but I told him I wouldn’t because he’d told me to stay on my stool. I had the pleasure of watching him running back and forth between his enormous breakfast and the levers, and all the while he was cursing me. In the end he got so cross that he threw his breakfast, plate and everything, out the window!’

By this time the war was in full swing and the main control offices for the railways were evacuated from London; for example the King’s Cross control room went up to Knebworth in Hertfordshire where it remains to this day. At the Holloway box George and his signalman would frequently receive what was called a London Central Yellow warning if enemy bombers were known to be in the area during the day; a London Central Red meant the bombers were really close.

‘Sometimes I wondered why they bothered to warn us,’ says George, ‘since there was nothing we could do. We just sat there like sitting targets and dimmed our lights a bit. It was mainly gas lights in those days so they were pretty dim anyway, and all the windows were blacked out with a hole left just big enough for the signalman to look out and peer up and down the line’.

‘In the back of the cabin at Holloway they fitted a steel shelter, actually inside the cabin. Old Dusty used to get nervy when there were bombers about, so he’d go into the shelter at the back of the box and tell me to get on with it. If bombs fell nearby I was supposed to dash into the steel box with him and sit on his lap – it was so small there was only room for the two of us that way. It always seemed funny to me, sitting there with this great big registration book open on my knees while Dusty held up an oil lamp so I could continue to fill the book in.

That metal box shelter was a complete waste of time, too –it was just a heavy steel box, so if the cabin had been hit it would have gone crashing down through the floor and we'd have been killed anyway. I suppose the idea was that it would at least protect us from flying glass.'

London at this time was definitely a scary place to be: all over the capital throughout the Blitz the German bombs could be heard going off, followed by the sound of anti-aircraft guns.

'Bombs often dropped near us,' says George, 'because the railways were a prime target. One night a massive bomb hit the ground right in front of our box, but by a miracle it just buried itself and failed to explode. If it had gone off some employees would have been killed, for sure.' As well as the constant risk of death at work, George had to cope with the very real danger of being killed at home. Like many Londoners, George has a fascinating tale of a narrow escape:

'It was 26 February 1941 – I can remember the exact date – and late that evening our next-door neighbour came round and asked us to join her. My dad had told my mum not to leave the house whatever happened because his theory was that if a bomb was going to get you, it would get you wherever you were, so might as well stay in the house. So my mum said no and we stayed put. A short while later our neighbour came in again; she was upset, and asked us again to join her. I think she just wanted company. Anyway, Mum again refused, and she stuck to her guns until the neighbour became hysterical. Then at last we relented and trooped into next door. A short while later our house took a direct hit and there's no doubt at all that if we'd stayed put we'd have all been killed; as it was they had to dig us out! There was a lot of bombing in the Potters Bar area because there were three railway tunnels in the area, and the Germans knew they would cause huge disruption if they managed to damage any of them.

'We moved to my grandmother's after that, and her roof was then blown off in an air raid. My mum was getting a bit paranoid by now – she thought the Germans were really after her, so she went to Devon to her mum's and dad's house, and would you believe it, she was bombed out there, too!'

To be continued ...

The opinions and views expressed in this News Sheet are not necessarily those of the Society or editor.

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