



"ONLINE"



THE NEWSLETTER OF THE WEST SOMERSET RAILWAY AND THE WEST SOMERSET RAILWAY ASSOCIATION MARCH 2009

UNDER NEW MANAGEMENT – THE WSRA

There I was standing in the wings watching the performance on stage when this big hand shoved me in the back, through the curtain and into the glare of the floodlights. Did someone say 'Chairman'? Oh heck, but I suppose I'm here now and nobody seems about to let me off the stage!

Seriously though I have been very grateful and humbled by the words of encouragement and support I have received as I have gone about the railway in the last couple of weeks or so. I hope I can do justice to that faith but I think all of us know it will not be the easiest of rides once the honeymoon is over. I am going to need your continued support and encouragement to take the WSRA to the next level of success - but if I am any judge of characters I shall not be lacking that support from the bulk of the railway's volunteers.

In the short term I shall be taking stock of my inheritance and not making any rash or hasty decisions. In deference to the general economic climate I will be encouraging my fellow Directors and other stake holders to rein in the more ambitious plans until we see how the income and necessary expenditure goes. There are a lot of ways to spend money and far fewer to earn it!

For now I am a little constrained with respect to my daytime availability by 'gainful employment' but if you do manage to catch me around the railway please feel free to stop me for a chat or of course you can drop me a line c/o BL Station. If neither of those works for you then I would encourage you to join the Cutting Back gang – they always have enough to say for themselves and have me captive!

Thank you for all you do for the railway, we shall need every bit of your enthusiasm and support this year,

(David Holmes)

SPECIAL EVENTS

As I write this report we are now only three weeks away from the start of the Spring Steam Gala and there is still much to be done if we are to be ready to welcome our visitors on what is known as “Super Saturday” in Rugby Union circles. (I mention this because I apologise now to you all for not being available on that day at Williton as I will be elsewhere at Twickenham to hopefully cheer on England to a great victory over Scotland). However I am sure all will go well without me as the members of SEPT have worked hard to deliver an attractive line-up of seven visiting steam locomotives that are capable of efficiently operating the planned intensive timetable alongside members of our “in-house” fleet and showcase all that is best about the West Somerset Railway. The publicity leaflet has been out for several weeks and congratulations to Martyn Snell and his little Team for producing a great leaflet that has caught the eye of many potential customers well beyond the boundaries of the South West Region. The new style Gala Souvenir Guide has also gone to print on time and will be “all colour” and a real Bargain at just £2.50 that no doubt will become a treasured archive item for many in the years to come. Well done to John Simms, our Guide Editor and Steve Tompkins who has become our Production Designer for Publicity Brochures and Souvenir Guides. The professional input is much appreciated.

To provide more coaches Andy Forster has hired-in an 8 coach dual brake ETH set that includes a generator brake coach and a buffet car plus 6 x TSO to maximise seating from Riviera Trains and we thank Charles Paget for his support. The set comes with her minder, Mick McGlade, a former senior Operating Supervisor at London Bounds Green Depot. Please make Mick welcome to our Railway, as well as all the visiting locomotive owners and support crews.

Contracts have been put in place for the coach link between the “Silk mills Park & Ride”, Taunton Railway Station and Bishops Lydeard that this year will operate on all designated SEPT event days in 2009. Contracts have also been put in place for the provision of contract staff to manage car parking at Bishops Lydeard thereby allowing the Station Staff to concentrate on welcoming all our visitors to the Gala. Hot Food outlets have also been booked for Bishops Lydeard, Williton, Watchet and Minehead for the Saturday and Sunday of both weekends. (Yes, before you ask, we do have the approval of a certain shop keeper at Bishops Lydeard for this new venture that is designed to answer a recurring visitor and staff complaint about the lack of hot food on Gala days, aside from the excellent fare offered by the Quantock Belle Team). The outlet at Williton will be sited in the DEPG Depot Yard so as we do not conflict with the new station buffet recently created in the former S&T workshop on the Down Platform. Finally, we have asked that improved station facilities including station toilet facilities, including regular servicing throughout the day, of the existing toilets is provided.

Obviously what SEPT cannot plan is the weather and so it has to be fingers crossed that the conditions are kinder to us this year than the cold, wet and miserable days we had to endure last March. Hopefully the sun will appear and many more people will make the effort to come and support our Railway and enjoy "Memories of the Big Four" even if many are, in reality, much too young to remember the LNER, LMS, SR and last, but certainly not least, the GWR.

Can I ask you all to let us have any feedback from the Gala, be it good news or bad, passing it to our SEPT Secretary, Justin Kerr-Peterson in the Commercial Office at Minehead as soon as possible after the close of the event so we can consider them at our scheduled SEPT meeting on the evening of Tuesday 10TH April. Your input will be much appreciated.

With delivery due from the printers on March 10th we will be able to distribute to all our visitors the publicity brochure for our next Gala, the "Mixed Traffic Weekend" scheduled for Friday 12th to Sunday 14th June. Hopefully this initiative will allow visitors to put those dates in their diaries and place their orders for Advance Rover Tickets on sale at 2008 prices. For that event we have provisionally booked three visiting diesel hydraulic locomotives and a visiting steam locomotive to complement the Williton-based Diesel Hydraulics in bringing "Maybach Music" back to the Quantock Hills.

Looking beyond June the Autumn Steam Gala will hopefully be a feast of GWR traction to bring back memories of the glorious past here in the South West pre 1948. Planning is already underway and approaches are being made to various GWR Locomotive Owners by Keith Speller to establish their availability for the beginning of October. Again we intend to have the publicity brochure ready for distribution to our visitors to the Mixed Traffic Gala in anticipation it will generate interest and advanced ticket sales.

Finally, I hope you all enjoy the Spring Steam Gala either as a visitor or a member of staff and that together we can make it a memorable event for good reasons that will lift awareness of our Railway and get 2009 off to a great start. Thank you all for your support of Special Events, be assured that it is truly appreciated by all the Special Events Planning Team.

(John Cronin: - Chairman SEPT)

GOOD RESULTS FROM HALF TERM TRAINS

The mixed steam and dmu service over the half-term holiday proved a success with passenger figures and revenue up by over 20%. However before there are cheery cries of "crisis, what crisis", flag days and budget increases all round we have to remember that we were blessed with good weather for the time of year and the holiday was back closer to its usual date. Had the very early Easter fallen this year

half-term would have coincided with the cold and the snow and prospects would not have looked so rose-tinted.

SPREADING THE WORD – I

In his SEPT notes John Cronin refers to the distribution of the leaflets for Gala events, and some of you may be interested to know how the distribution is done.

The normal print run is 15,000 and before these are received we attempt to have envelopes labelled with individual names and addresses from the appropriate database. (The biggest is the steam enthusiast one with circa 5000 names on it). As well as the brochure these envelopes also contain information about purchasing Lineside Photographic Passes, both Annual and Event Only and contact details of the Tourist Information Centres at Minehead, Taunton, Porlock, Watchet, Bridgwater and Wellington for those having difficulty finding accommodation.

Over the month after printing I carry out a rolling programme of sending small batches of leaflets to branches of Railway Societies as they hold their monthly meetings. We also send out to other heritage lines – particularly those holding Galas during the lead-up time to our event – the various Railway Museums and some mainline stations whose staff have been kind enough to offer to carry our stuff. I also load-up Tourist Information Centres so that we have a chance to reach the general public as well as the enthusiasts. And of course we send leaflets to the WSR stations and try to make sure we keep the buffet cars' information racks stocked. It is recognised that we do not get passengers by accident and we have to work for what we get.

(John Simms)

SPECIAL PROJECTS

We had almost forgotten how to run a Log Train as it was several years since we needed one but Saturday February 28th proved that old habits die hard as we lifted a substantial amount of timber from along the line and cranked up the marketing machine.

Groaning under the weight we worked the Elks, Lowmac and a Starfish down to Norton where a scene a bit like Stig of the Dump awaited us in the shape of numerous vans, cars, tractors and trailers who descended on the pile of timber almost as soon as it hit the ground. Not convinced my trusty band had adequately enjoyed themselves to the point of total exhaustion I found 80 sleepers to load onto the train before it returned to Lydeard for the night.

On Sunday the train returned to Lydeard and the sleepers were offloaded for sale to a local developer to line an access road. By the end of Sunday morning the hordes had gorged themselves, the logs and sleepers were gone and the Association bank

manager was booking his holiday to the Caribbean....and the Cutting Back Gang now need more undergrowth to tame:

- Saturday March 14th – Black Monkey Bridge
- Sunday March 15th – Stogumber
- Saturday April 4th – Watchet
- Sunday April 5th – Watchet

Why pay Gym fees? – Come cutting back!
(David Holmes)

ANNUAL FLAILING

In good time for the Spring Steam Gala we welcomed back the rail-mounted flails from Dingle Brothers during the last two weeks of February. It's interesting to note the rate of grow-back along the WSR. After Dingle's machines have been through pictures taken during the SSG show the Lineside looking almost like British Railways days in the 1950's and early 1960's. The contrast with shots taken seven months later in October when nature has had some chance to reassert itself is very marked.

CIVIL ENGINEERING DEPARTMENT NEWS

a) SNOW LUCK FOR BLUE ANCHOR LEVEL CROSSING RENEWAL

February's twenty year snow record unfortunately coincided with biggest item in the Winter Works Programme Project taking place, the renewal of Blue Anchor's level crossing. The road surface over the level crossing had been starting to disintegrate, with tarmac patches having to be put on tarmac patches and this was also not assisted by the age related deterioration of the track through the level crossing and the poor formation drainage.

The last time that the level crossing had seen any repair, as opposed to routine maintenance work, was more than 25 years ago and even this was not a comprehensive renewal. February's scheme was carefully pre-planned, but even with great attention to detail, there could not be a contingency provision that allowed for days of freezing cold weather and a heavy snow fall! Without the extra work effort that was put in by all of those on the railway involved in the project, both volunteer and staff, then the weather conditions could have delayed the re-opening of the line in time for the half term week service. It got so cold at one stage that the new

ballast for the track had actually frozen solid in the wagons that delivered it to the site.

The comprehensive advanced publicity campaign that involved hundred's of notification letters being delivered by dedicated volunteers to local businesses and residents, advising them of the two week total road closure, helped to ensure that we did not receive any complaints about the closure. Indeed some Blue Anchor residents appeared to have enjoyed the lack of through road traffic for two weeks, although Peter Treharne was probably just pleased to get his station back to normal again!

The work was actually completed five minutes over the planned finish schedule time on Friday 13th February, which considering the bad weather experienced during the two weeks of the work, is an excellent achievement by everyone involved. Local Minehead firm C.J. Lynch applied a tarmac road surface over the level crossing, this has been designed to be more flexible than the old surface and it is now hoped that the level crossing will last for at least another thirty years before it all needs doing again.

b) MORE BAD WEATHER PROBLEMS –

Whilst the Blue Anchor work was being undertaken we had to deal with two problem bank slips that had been caused by the snow melt. The first of these caused the collapse of a culvert headwall in the Upside bank adjacent to Kentsford Crossing and urgent remedial works had to be undertaken in order to stabilise and support the bank and re-build the wall.

At Stogumber the snow melt brought down a large area of the clay that lies on the bedrock in the steep bank. This slip was at the Williton end of the station and it blocked the road access that runs along the base of the bank.

Thanks also go to Pete Camm and Gary Hall from the Company PW gang who went out to clear fallen trees and minor earth slips from the line on Friday 13th March. It turned out to be a difficult work day for them given the amount of manual graft that was required, but the result was a line that could, on the following day, be re-opened to our visitors for the 2009 season.

(Tony Phillips)

DIESEL NEWS

On the last day of February it finally happened. Yes, the Maybach MD870 engine recently fitted into Class 35 “Hymek” D7017 burst into life at 15.15 hrs. after several hours of checks to ensure as far as possible that all was well before the “Start” button was depressed for the first time in earnest in nearly four years. For those present the sound of a Maybach coming to life brought back great memories of days past and hopefully heralded many more to come later this year. At this point I feel I must offer congratulations to Andy Purse on behalf of the Williton Team

because he has dedicated hundreds of hours to the rebuild of this engine. As Andy will quietly tell you, it is the largest diesel engine he has rebuilt to date and a great load was lifted off his shoulders on the day when she burst into life and quickly settled down to run very smoothly. At the end of the afternoon she was ready to take power and Neil McCannon had the honour of moving D7017 under her own power back into her berth in the shed so we can complete the many minor tasks and refit the roof panels ready to commence test running on the weekend of March 7th and 8th if all goes to plan. The test of our success will be if the "Mekydro" transmission performs to specification because back in August 2005 it was a transmission failure that originally sidelined the locomotive and so for now D7017 remains as work in progress but we are ever hopeful she will be ready to return to service at the beginning of June 2009.

Assuming we are successful with D7017 her place in the shed will be taken by Class 42 "Warship" D832 "Onslaught" that requires minor attention to one of her two Maybach MD 650 engines, She should be resident in the Shed for both weekends of the Spring Steam Gala and then she will join D7017 on running-in trials. Her place in the shed will then be taken by Class 52 "Western" D1010 "Western Campaigner" once this locomotive has been to Bishops Lydeard for underframe attention during our DEPG Work Week at the beginning of April. Currently the "Western" stands in the Depot South Yard where the Team are progressing many tasks identified by Western Chief Engineer, Robert Tiller whilst he personally continues to progress the rebuild of the Maybach MD 655 engine in the shed.

Away from the diesel hydraulics both Class 08 D3462 and Class 33 D6566 have returned to traffic after their respective exams were completed with the underframe exams over the pit at Bishops Lydeard on the last day of the month. The Company Service locomotive for the month has been Class 25 D7523 that was employed for 12 days on engineering trains. She was also used on the last day of February to haul the log recovery train that this year started from Blue Anchor and ran through to Norton Fitzwarren to unload before returning to Bishops Lydeard to stable overnight.

Looking ahead the DEPG Diesel Depot and Heritage Diesel Visitor Centre will be open on Sunday 8th March for "Members Day" when some of the Team will be on duty to welcome WSR/WSRA Shareholders and Members. Then at the end of March our DEPG facilities will be open again to visitors for all 6 days of the Spring Steam Gala. Please feel free to call in and meet our DEPG Williton Team if you are down Williton way on those days.

(John Cronin)

NORTON FITZWARREN

We have had a busy period at Norton recently having spent Valentine's day messing about in the riverwell not quite a river but a fairly large drainage ditch separating our trackbed from the 'other railway'. We used an excavator to take out a large number of willow roots that were blocking the ditch and preventing it flowing.

Under the transfer arrangements with Network Rail we become liable for the maintenance of the ditch so it was important that we took over the liability in the best condition. Network Rail provided a COSS, Luffman provided an excavator and Special Projects supplied the muscle. Result one clean, free flowing ditch and a number of wet and smelly volunteers! (Ditch water you understand.) We have also fenced the field boundary to ensure our clearance work has not endangered the Main Line.

Elsewhere we expect to have taken delivery of two redundant points from Network Rail by the time this appears in print and have also received 60 substantial point timbers from a relay at Mutley in Plymouth. We have sold several tons of scrap rail to boost the funds a little, the ballast piles are growing and all in all it must be time to start getting some more ballast and track down.

Hopefully many of you will have had the opportunity to see progress for yourselves from the DMU on Member's Day. (I have been asked why the DMU did not run onto the triangle for Member's Day – simple answer is that the triangle has not been offered to HMRI for approval and the Allerford Jnc. catch does not have an FPL. Until it has been inspected and approved we cannot run trains carrying passengers on the line.)

(David Holmes)

LOG TRAIN

Of course in addition to Dingle's work there is the ever-ongoing year round efforts of the cutting back teams and on February 28th a special train ran to collect the logs from the heavier parts of the vegetation removal. These will be sold to raise a few more pounds for the Railway.

NEW PAST AND PRESENT BOOK AND DVD TO BE LAUNCHED AT SPRING STEAM GALA

Such is the pace of change on the West Somerset Railway that "The NOSTALGIA Collection" is launching a second volume of its book about the WSR at the upcoming Spring Steam Gala. The new book, "West Somerset Railway, Past and Present" has been compiled and edited by David Williams, editor of the WSR "Journal" and features comparative "then and now" pictures from both the GWR and BR days and also from the start of the preservation era in the 1970's and 80's. Volume I, overseen by John Stretton is also still in print. Both run to 96 pages and feature 170- 180 photos of the West Somerset from Norton Fitzwarren to

Minehead. Volume 1 costs £15.99 from WSR shops and Volume 2 will retail at £15.99. (ring 01643 700387 or 01823 432125 for postage and packing information)

Also being launched at the Spring Gala is the first "On Track" DVD produced to accompany a "Past and Present Volume". This will also use archive and current shots and will cost £16.95 from West Somerset Railway" shops.

The launch of both the new book and the dvd will take place at Minehead Station over the second weekend of the Spring Steam Gala, March 26th to 29th.

RAILTOUR TO LONDON

Past Time Rail is running another trip from Minehead to Paddington on May 30th, with No. 6024. Planned departure time from Minehead is 7 a.m. with pick-ups at Blue Anchor, Watchet, Williton, Crowcombe Heathfield, Bishops Lydeard and Taunton. The train is due into London at 13.05 with the return journey starting at 17.35 and arrival back at Minehead at 22.10. Fares start at £75 for Standard Class through to Premier Class at £180.00. Details can be obtained from and bookings made via 01543 411971.

MINEHEAD SHOP AND CAFÉ

Components and shop fittings from the Minehead Branch of Woolworths have found a new home and are once again carrying stock for sale.

During the period between January 4th, when the West Somerset Railway closed for its winter maintenance period and its re-opening for half-term trains on February 14th, the Railway's Retail Manager Colin Howard and a small team of staff and volunteers completely revamped the interior layout of the Minehead Station Shop, incorporating the salvaged units.

"The Minehead Shop has been very successful but the interior layout had stayed the same for over a decade and we felt it was time for a change and to incorporate various ideas based on the experience of the shop staff," said WSR General Manager Paul Conibeare., "and its first weekend went well. It feels a less-cluttered environment and we look forward to seeing how it works when the Spring Steam Gala brings the first really big crowds at the end of March."

February 14th also marked the re-opening of the café at Minehead Station, situated adjacent to the turntable area, which saw a steady flow of trade through the day as visitors enjoyed the chance of a cup of tea and a sandwich whilst awaiting the next train.

MARCH 23rd MINERAL LINE TRIP

For those who are spending the week between the first part of the Spring Gala and the second in the area and for those who want to stay a little longer we are running

an extra trip to see the remains of the West Somerset Railway Mineral Railway. Intending passengers should make their own way to Williton Station in time for 11.00 and the departure of the Blue Motors of Exmoor Vintage bus. This will be driven by Martyn Babb who is also the courier for the day and whose knowledge of the old WSMR route is very detailed. The bus should be back at Williton station by 17.00. There will be an upper limit of 23 tickets available for the trip and the cost is £13. Lunch (not included in the price) will be taken at an Exmoor/Brendon Hills hostelry. Tickets can be purchased over the phone by ringing 01643 704996.

ANOTHER WSR BOOK FROM DON BISHOP

WSR volunteer and photographer Don Bishop has another pictorial book due out in May 2009. "Spirit of the West Somerset Railway" will be published by Halsgrove Press. The new book will be a pocket sized album in their popular "Spirit" series and will feature around 60 of Don's images of the West Somerset taken over the last six years. It will cost just £4.99 and will of course be available from the shops at Bishops Lydeard Station and Minehead Station as well as many other local book shops.

IMPROVEMENTS AT THE GAUGE MUSEUM

Over the winter the Curator and team have been busy revamping some of the displays in the Gauge Museum at Bishops Lydeard. New displays have been mounted illustrating the history of the line. A series of historical leaflets has been produced which will be on sale for 20p each in the Museum. The meeting room area has been redecorated and RAMS (Restoration and Maintenance Squad) have erected a new screen with a large notice board which now carries reproductions of railway posters. There is more work to do, notably filling the new display cases, but this should all be done in time for the [Spring Steam Gala](#). This will be an interesting weekend as it is planned to have Queen Victoria in attendance (aka Julia Clewes) to host our visitors.

THE COMMERCIAL MANAGER WRITES FROM AUSTRALIA

The Railway has had a very encouraging start to the 2009 season with the numbers travelling during the February half term nicely up on 2008. It is also pleasing to report that the advanced bookings for the Spring Steam Gala are also significantly higher than last year.

These are early days however in what could be a difficult season and the Commercial department relies as much as the operational and mechanical parts of the railway for on-going support. Do feel free to tell as many people as you can about the railway and do come and visit the Commercial Office and collect leaflets and timetables to distribute wherever you can..

(Martyn Snell)

MINEHEAD SHOP

As from Friday 27th February we will no longer be selling cold drinks, teabags, coffee, etc. These will be sold in the Kiosk.

This may be reviewed in the Autumn so that drinks can be sold to staff through the off-season.

(Colin Howard)

VOLUNTEER ACCOMMODATION

The WSR Board have authorised £10,000 to be spent on volunteer accommodation at Minehead. We are currently looking for a Voluntary Project Manager to oversee this much-needed improvement to our overnight accommodation. Contact me via paul.gm@wsrail.net.

(Paul Conibeare)

NEW CALENDAR

In accordance with usual practice the 2010 WSR Calendar is on sale in time for the Spring Gala. The price is held to last year's and if you would like to order it by phone please ring 01643 700387 or 01823 432125 with your card ready. Or buy it at the SSG.

SPREADING THE WORD – 2

During the last few weeks the publicity folks have been out and about. Colin Howard and Judy Hall attended a local event at Brean whilst Justin Kerr-Peterson and Alan Meade went to the South Somerset Leaflet Fair at Yeovilton Museum. Elsewhere Hugh Gloyn and John Simms, plus Antony Brunt of the Exmoor Tourist Association spent two productive days at the NEC in Birmingham at the Travel Trade Britain Show. This is a new event taking place instead of Travel Trade Britain which has been moved to London Docklands by Visit Britain. Despite it being a new

show there was plenty of productive activity over the two days with new contacts being made and old friends and faces renewing acquaintance.

STEAM BUS TRIPS MARCH 22nd.

As a one day, one off, extra attraction during the Gala the steam bus will be running from outside Minehead Station during the day giving short trips around various parts of the town, and adding another distinctive whistle to the proceedings as it goes.

HERITAGE CARRIAGE PROJECT NEWS

A drawing board looking for a lift. Claire Sheppy of the West Somerset Steam Railway Trust's Heritage Carriages Project explains, "We have been offered a professional drawing board and stand which in conjunction with Gareth Winter of the West Somerset Restoration team I have arranged to be able to have for both the WSSRT team members and members of the West Somerset Restoration Team to be able to use in the Office in the former concrete works site at Williton. It is currently at Hursley (five miles south west of Winchester) but is too big to be brought to Williton by car. Is there anyone with a lorry or van (or motor caravan) who is planning on coming down to the WSR in the fairly near future who would be prepared to call to collect it and then bring it to Williton please? If so could you please reply with contact info to the WSSRT email address at info@wssrt.co.uk "

RUNNING IN BOARD AT MINEHEAD

A new running-in board for Minehead. The RAMS team (Restoration and Maintenance Squad, based at Bishops Lydeard) have constructed a new running board for Minehead Station. The board was delivered and erected today in a joint effort by the RAMS men and the Friends of Minehead Station team. RAMS are congratulated on producing a superb replacement for the old board which was completely rotten. FOMS member Allan Hinde wondered if we could put his name on one side. The fine work will surely be much photographed by the masses at the [Spring Steam Gala](#).

TAUNTON MODEL RAILWAY GROUP

TMRG will have their club room at Bishops Lydeard Station open to the public (for an admission charge) during the Spring Steam Gala on March 21st, 22nd, 27th, 28th and 29th. With three engines that worked the Somerset and Dorset line (88, 34028 and

34046) due to be working trains in the Gala the superb model of Bath Green Park in 4 mm scale will add nicely to part of the day.