



"ONLINE"



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

MESSAGE FROM THE GENERAL MANAGER'S OFFICE TUESDAY 31ST MARCH 2009.

10,636 passengers overs 6 days, a new WSR Spring Steam Gala Record.

Headline news which we will all be reading about in the railway press over the next few weeks, but it does not reflect the enormous effort, before, during, and after the event from you the team that made it all possible, without which we would not be starting the long recovery from last season.

The positive e mails keep coming in, even from those that traveled on the delayed services on Saturday, so we have put on another leading event in the history of the Heritage Railways in the UK.

This year will be our 30th Anniversary of re-opening to Bishops Lydeard and this event has proved we should all be proud of what we have achieved as a team, and as we have been blessed with excellent weather- long may it continue.

We are due to meet Raitour operators on the 7th April with a special charter train running that day to show them when we can, and cannot accept trains on and off the WSR.

Once again many thanks for your continued support.

(Paul Conibeare – General Manager)

MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIRMAN DATED 30th MARCH

The tranquility at Minehead Station this morning was interrupted only by groups of workers and a handful of visitors taking a last look at Royal Scot; what a contrast from the two weekends just past. At times, the normally spacious platforms had seemed almost overwhelmed by the numbers number of people, as trains arrived,

were serviced and despatched, traders promoted their wares and photographers jostled for that elusive key location near the turntable.

A visit to the Strand café for fish and chips confirmed that it was not only the Railway that had enjoyed successful trading!

All this was made possible because a group of people “The Special Events Planning Team” work long hours assembling an inspirational collection of locomotives, and organising a range of support activities and services so that a huge number of you can come and work very long hours over several days to provide an intensive service of trains, catering, souvenirs and other sales, and most of all provide a great West Somerset welcome.

I hope you enjoyed the results of your labours, I hope you feel proud of your efforts and the impact you made, I hope you found time to share in the excitement, and most of all I hope that you will accept my thanks for all that you have done.

Early last week, I was very privileged to be able to visit no 11 Downing Street where I found myself optimistically describing the WSR Spring Gala as the best place in Europe to see a large collection of steam trains at work.

Events over the weekend confirmed that this was no idle boast.

Thank you.

(Mark Smith)

CIVIL ENGINEERING DEPARTMENT NEWS

a) ON TRACK MACHINE VISIT –

During March we were able to secure the services of an Amey Rail Tamping Machine for five consecutive days. These later generation machines have the ability to both lift and pack and also slew, thus both top level and alignment track issues can be dealt with by the one machine. The tamper was made available to the WSR on a cost neutral basis because it would give Amey staff a training opportunity. This was not to be training new recruits but existing staff, who when working on the national rail network normally do not have the time to be fully skill assessed in a live work environment.

The best way that this could be achieved, with time available at each work site, was to work on the WSR, where there was less time pressure and the advantage of daylight working. Thus the actual site work can be discussed prior, during and post the work on site, without any risk of delaying hand back after a possession, which these days can have severe financial implications for contractors. Working in a yard, or on a siding does not allow the live practical element of working on a running line to be replicated.

My colleague, Mike Shaw did a lot of preparatory inspection and survey work, so that when the machine arrived on the WSR it was possible to make the best use of it and to ensure that its computer controlled system was given the optimum data to give the best results. The training became a little too realistic when the machine developed a fault on the first day and on day two it was re-calibrated by Plasser engineers on the level track in the yard at Washford (many thanks to Nigel and team for access to the yard and for the tea !).

As a result of the work a number of problem sites have been dealt with and we hope that readers will judge the success for themselves by the 'seat of the pants' method. It should be noted that it would be not be possible to achieve either the accuracy, or the speed, of the machines work output by traditional manual methods. Indeed in terms of speed of output for the work that the machine achieved, it would be expected that on a like for like basis, it would take manual working many weeks to get anywhere near the volume of work undertaken by the machine and with much less accuracy. It is thus easy to see why historically BR was so keen to purchase on track machines and cut down on manpower, because of the more for less argument and with much better quality of work output.

b) LARGE LOCOMOTIVE GAUGE CLEARANCES –

The arrival for the Spring Gala of locomotive types that had not visited the WSR previously raised the issue of gauge clearances. This resulted in a preliminary desk top / computer analysis being undertaken, which was supported by check measurements at all sites of possible concern. The outcome of this being that one or two locations were identified as being tight to the dimensional tolerance limit for the gauge clearance envelope and that one or two others would require minor alteration works (that is to the infrastructure not the locomotives !).

Apart from physical dimensions, the other issues that introducing new stock to the rail infrastructure involve are an investigation of axle weights and track curvature. The axle weights of the A4 and the Royal Scot were not an issue because of the early foresight that the WSR had, when it undertook strengthening of the weaker bridges on the line. Whilst there are some tight radius curves on the line for the likes of such large locomotives, they are not a problem for occasional event use. The locomotive owner's representative on the A4 did however say that he was observing at times in the tighter curves, a greater amount of lateral movement of the trailing cartazi truck (i.e. on an A4 this is the type of fixing of the single wheelset under the cab), than he had ever seen before when out on the running line of a heritage railway.

Gauge clearance issues require the involvement of the Civil and the Mechanical Engineering Departments because as described above, the dimensional specification of the stock in question is firstly applied to the known infrastructure data in a

theoretical way. This is then followed where required, with physical testing to validate the data, because in reality physical circumstances, can and do change. Because the WSR has a maximum running speed of 25mph the dynamic clearance issues (i.e. locomotive and train movement laterally and vertically at speed), are not as much of a factor as they are at higher speeds on the national network.

Physical structures on the national network have and do, get struck for a variety of reasons and thus the ultimate check involves a practical clearance test that should of course support the data analysis. In recent times on the national rail network there has been a move towards a more refined process that involves laser measurements being taken from moving test trains. However, the WSR is a heritage railway and we use heritage methods, namely a person with a keen eye and a measuring stick!

Thus when A4 Bittern arrived from the national network it ran to Minehead in gauge clearance test mode. Merv Hebditch and Stuart Nelhams greatly assisted the process by their skillful control of the locomotive when running at each test site at a constant dead slow speed. The practical test confirmed the theory and thus the spectacle of a streamlined LNER A4 fitting into a quintessential GWR West Country branch line was enjoyed from the line side by hundreds of spectators. Hopefully this will have proven to be a good omen for a successful Spring Gala.

To finish on an amusing note, one lady who observed me walking in front of the A4 along the platform at Washford was heard to say 'has that man had to walk backwards all the way from Bishops Lydeard'!

(Tony Phillips)

SPECIAL EVENTS NEWS

Well, did you enjoy the Spring Steam Gala, despite the many challenges we had to face in the build-up and during the event? Hopefully your answer is "Yes" and you will forgive me as SEPT Chairman for penning the note in the appropriate Traffic Notice following the dismal time keeping performance on the first Saturday suggesting how we might collectively sharpen up our performance. In the main it worked but on the second Saturday with the need to manage a monster mainline charter train things went downhill again and, as one example, the last Minehead Station staff booked off duty at 10 p.m. after a day which began at 7 a.m. This year the weather was much kinder to us with sunshine on all six days and that must mean in due course we should see some great photographs on the web and the railway magazines in due course showing our Railway at its best. The weather the first weekend was like early summer and many visitors and staff sat around in the sunshine at Williton to enjoy their warm food and drink supplied by the latest SEPT venture, "The Cornish Pasty Van" parked in the DEPG Diesel Depot Yard next to the Gala Control Office. Hot food outlets were also provided at Bishops Lydeard, Watchet and Minehead (the last supplementing a very busy Turntable Kiosk Café) in response to visitor comments at previous Galas and I understand that they were all well received by visitors and staff.

The last four days were a tad cooler as described by Chief District Inspector Chris Thacker as he enjoyed yet another pasty but were still pleasant for the many visitors exploring the DEPG Diesel Depot, Heritage Diesel Visitor Centre and South Yard. In total we welcomed 10,636 passengers to our Railway, a record number for a Spring Steam Gala since we moved to a six day event in 2006. For your information the passengers per day were as follows:-

	SAT	SUN	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN	TOTAL
2006	1680	1246	715	1796	2156	1426	9019
2007	2082	1153	743	1268	3267	2016	10529
2008	1239	898	643	904	1548	1092	6324
2009	1812	1138	1300	1537	2812	2037	10636

The final visitor locomotive line –up this year proved to be a winner with the magnificent Gresley A4 Pacific no. 60019 “Bittern” sharing the glare of the spotlights with LMS Rebuilt “Royal Scot” Class 4-6-0 no. 6100 “Royal Scot” as first time visitors to our Railway. They were ably supported by visiting GWR “Hall” Class 4-6-0 no. 4936 “Kinlet Hall”, LMS “Black Five 4-6-0 no 45231 “The Sherwood Forester”, SR Rebuilt “West Country” Pacific no. 34028 “Eddystone” and GWR 0-6-2T no. 6695 plus our Minehead-based home fleet including “Braunton”. For the first time at a Gala I was able to escape from Williton and visit many places along the line and feedback from staff and visitors was positive as they enjoyed the sights and sounds. I managed a traditional cream tea in the Restaurant Car on the Thursday afternoon, another first after nine years on this Railway and was pleased to learn from the QB team that they had served a record number of the “full English” breakfasts to passengers. The shops at both ends of the line were busy and at Bishops Lydeard “Arkwright” complained to me with a twinkle in his eye that perhaps we had too many potential buyers for his emporium to serve. Room to move on the trains and find a seat was also a real benefit to passengers and staff as the decision to hire-in a rake of eight coaches from Riviera Trains to complement our home-based fleet proved to be a winner despite the unbudgeted cost of hire and transport to and from Eastleigh. Overall I feel we can proudly claim “Together we delivered an Award Winning First Class Gala” and have set the Railway Year off to a great start that hopefully will continue in the months ahead when we look forward to welcoming AI Pacific no. 60163 “Tornado” to us for three weeks in June. However not everything we did was 100% and SEPT would welcome written inputs by email or hard copy from colleagues to SEPT Secretary Justin Kerr-Peterson so he

can place them before the Team at our next meeting scheduled for the evening of Tuesday April 7th.

Looking ahead the next scheduled Special Event is the Mixed Traffic Gala to be held between Friday 12th and Sunday 14th June. Traditionally this has been a diesel-based event and this year we hope to see more of the DEPG Williton based diesel hydraulics in service to complement visiting Class 52 "Western" no. D1062 "Western Courier" from Bridgenorth on the Severn Valley Railway courtesy of the Western Loco Association and Class 14 no. D9520 from Wansford on the Nene Valley Railway courtesy of the Iron and Steel Traction Group. However this event falls towards the end of the "Tornado" visit so many eyes may be on the steam visitor rather than the diesels on this occasion – we shall see. You will have seen that SEPT managed to have the Mixed Traffic Gala and the Autumn Steam Gala Leaflet will be ready for the June event so passengers will know what we plan next and when before they leave for home, hopefully to support us again the next time.

The nominal theme for the Autumn Steam Gala to be held between Thursday October 1st and Sunday 4th is "Great Western", something we have not done for several years, so if you want to wallow in Great Western Railway nostalgia then the West Somerset Railway is the place to be on the first weekend of October.

Thank you all for your support on behalf of the Special Events Team.

(John Cronin – Chairman SEPT)

WHERE WERE THE CAMERAS?

On Wednesday 11th March the Permanent Way Department has two trains at Norton Fitzwarren. The Class 25 and two "Elks" were on the running line alongside the Class 08 with a brake van and five ballast hoppers on the siding. This was for the purpose of shunting the two rakes of wagons into one train. Was this the first time two trains have been side by side on our Railway at Norton?

Even better, on Friday 13th March the P.Way Train was standing in the down platform at Blue Anchor while the Steam Engineman Course Steam Goods passed on the up line. Was this the first time two freight trains have passed at Blue Anchor? The P. Way Dept would like to thank Graham, Lenny, John, Peter and Fenton who all helped to run our train from Dunster to Norton and back to Dunster. Thanks also to Nigel for the shunting moves at Washford. Over four days we collected redundant sleepers, scrap rails and dropped ballast at Washford ready for the Tamper.

(Alan Cottrell)

DIESEL NEWS

March has proved to be a successful month for the Williton based DEPG Team with the return to full working order of our Class 35 "Hymek" no. D7017 after nearly four long years out of service. On a couple of Saturday evenings early in the month after the last service train of the day had cleared the Williton to Blue Anchor section we took the locomotive for some test runs towards Blue Anchor using our Class 47 no. D1661 "North Star" as both a test load and insurance just in case something went wrong. The aim was to load the rebuilt Maybach MD870 engine and prove all was now well with the Mekyro Transmission system that was the real reason for the withdrawal of the locomotive back in 2005 when she suffered a transmission failure at Washford during a Diesel Gala. The next step is to arrange a loaded test run with a set of eight coaches that looks like taking place after Easter. With the "Hymek" serviceable Class 42 "Warship" no. D832 "Onslaught" has taken her place in the Diesel Shed so we could progress an engine repair to one of her two Maybach MD 650 engines involving a cylinder head exchange during the Spring Steam Gala. This work was undertaken over the two weekends and again we managed a successful restart after we closed the Shed for the night to Gala visitors. So by the end of March we are two down with two to go in terms of providing serviceable diesel hydraulics for the Mixed Traffic Gala in June. Next up will be Class 14 "Teddy Bear" no. D9526 that currently resides in the Heritage Diesel Visitor Centre being repainted for the first time since 2001. Mechanically she is serviceable although her dedicated Engineers are progressing some improvements that should improve her reliability in service. Last but not least of course is the Group flagship locomotive Class 52 "Western" no. D1010 "Western Campaigner" that has spent the winter months in store in Number 1 siding in Williton South Yard. Our plan is to move D1010 into the Diesel Shed after the Spring Steam Gala following a trip to Bishops Lydeard before Easter for an underframe examination over the inspection pit in the locomotive compound. Currently the rebuild of her "B" end Maybach MD655 engine is being progressed by here Engineers in the Diesel Shed and we hope to have it ready to install in the locomotive in late May just in time to ready the locomotive for the June Gala when she is due to appear with sister D1062 "Western Courier".

Away from the diesel hydraulics our diesel electricians soldier on undertaking the many behind the scenes tasks required by the Company in readying the WSR for the 2009 season. Class 25 no. D7523 and Class 08 no. D3462 have seen service in recent months supported on occasions by Class 33 no. D6566. Sadly our Class 47 no. D1661 "North Star" has had to be withdrawn from service at the end of March with failed batteries and we are currently deciding how we might find a replacement set so the locomotive can return to service for the June Gala.

As always the DEPG opened the Diesel Depot and Heritage Diesel Visitor Centre for all six days of the recent Spring Steam Gala and we welcomed many visitors who

gave generously to support all our activities. There were many kind comments in the Visitors Book that are much appreciated by our DEPG Volunteers who give freely of their time and often their pocket money to keep the "Williton Dream" alive. Long may it continue.

(John Cronin)

BUFFER STOPS TO YOU

Do you know how many buffer stops there are on our Railway, or where they came from? Some were part of the gallimaufry and some were still in place when we re-opened. Others have been brought to the Railway, from afar or moved a short distance.

For instance, one stop came from Puriton Royal Ordnance Factory to Washford and then to Crowcombe Heathfield alongside Puff Cottage. After that it went to the Loco Compound at Bishops Lydeard and is now on the "Quantock Belle" siding. Does anyone out there have knowledge of the history of any of the others that are dotted about.

Please send any information you can to the Permanent Way Department c/o Minehead Office for the attention of Gary Hall. We will collate the anticipated huge amount of interesting information for our records and possible future articles.

We think the answer to the opening question is fifteen standing, four lying disassembled and we haven't even mentioned the many different designs. It's over to you.

(Alan Cottrell)

WILLITON NEWS

a) "BRAUNTON"

Following some minor attention and a formal 28 day maintenance examination, 34046 was the subject of an MIC class on 14 March for 32 footplate staff on the locomotive's operating and servicing requirements. Such was the popularity of this event that a further class is being arranged for Saturday 9 May. Since then the 'Braunton' ran in the WSR Spring Gala alongside its WC classmate no.34028 'Eddystone' and the other visiting locomotives.

In the workshop the new tender tank awaits fitting to the chassis which is in the final stages of being riveted together. The first new axlebox has been proof machined and Cerdic Foundries have been asked to complete the other five. The wheel sets have been cleaned and given first coat of primer. Advice is being sought from both our VAB and the AI Trust on the materials to use and source for the coupling and brake gear components in the absence of UK companies interested in 'one-off' forgings.

As part of the new management arrangements the locomotive, tender, and support coach are now owned by 'Locomotive 34046 Limited', a newly registered company. In turn a Braunton Management Group is being formed to oversee all operating, maintenance, repair and associated finance matters from now on. Initially any contact should be made via Williton which will be the locomotive's home shed.

b) 6024

Unfortunately 'King Edward I' failed its annual boiler inspection following firebox repairs owing to some previously undetected cracks in the tubeplate. It was parked in WN South Yard on display for the Gala weekends and whilst the owners determined the scope of repair work required.

c) 6960

The chassis of 'Raveningham Hall' has arrived at Williton and is awaiting completion of the boiler by the Flour Mill when the Works will re-assemble the locomotive and complete the outstanding overhaul work. The completed tender is to remain at Toddington for the time being.

d) 7821

'Ditcheat Manor' locomotive arrived at Williton from Crewe a few days before the Gala and awaits a full inspection to determine the extent of work required and estimated costs to enable the WSRA to decide whether 4561 or 7821 is to be overhauled first.

e) WILLITON GENERALLY

Regularly presents a busy appearance with 4 steam locomotives in the South Yard, 1 or 2 more inside the workshop with 3 coaches and the new tender, and 6024's Support Coach parked in the North Yard. The Works has also had a request from Southern Locomotives to lift no.34028 before it leaves the WSR for some attention to its axle boxes. To assist Gareth, Ray Waldron has been promoted to Shop Foreman to oversee day to day production.

(Mike Johns)

PROMOTING THE SPRING GALA

John Cronin, Special Events Planning Team Chairman, thought it would be of interest for me to outline what steps go into promoting the Spring Steam Gala and so the following is a general outline.

The main weapon is the Gala Leaflet. For most Galas we print 15,000 and the trick once they are received is placing them where they are likely to bring in business. Initially we roll out a mailshot to the 5000- plus names and addresses on our Steam Enthusiast database. As well as the leaflet they receive other information about photography, local accommodation contacts etc. The next points of call are other heritage lines who operate between New Year and the end of March, particularly those who are holding their own Galas and from where we have a chance of getting those “really must try their one this year” bookings. There are also the various National Railway Museums. From that it’s on to the Tourist Information Centres around the area and also to some mainline network contacts who have arranged to put our stuff on display. The “Railway Magazine” has a very useful list of Railway Society meetings and packages are sent to these as the month after arrival of the leaflets unrolls. There are also a number of useful Events Listing websites, both local and national on to which the events can be entered.

As matters get closer it’s time to try some Press Releases. The main attraction for the Spring event was the visit of “Bittern” and the fact that it was arriving by rail. An initial Release was published and a follow-up sent a week later. This led to picture coverage of the engine’s arrival in the local press and Martyn Snell doing a live interview on the drive time programme on Somerset Sound.

WEST SOMERSET RAILWAY BEER.

“Old Steamer” is a new bottled beer being introduced. The idea follows on from our own label house wine but this beer will be selling in large numbers. It is envisaged that travellers who choose not to drink whilst on the trains will perhaps take the odd bottle home as a souvenir. We will shortly be offering cardboard 3 beer bottle carriers (similar to supermarket wine boxes) for those wishing to buy bottles as presents.

The beer is provided through a partnership with Cotleigh Brewery of Wiveliscombe and the label will feature 9351 on a passenger train. They brew it, bottle it, market it and ensure that it meets every legal requirement. In return, we permit them to sell the beer through other outlets ranging from corner shops, off licences, pubs and possibly supermarket chains.

This is where it becomes interesting. The WSR will receive just over 4p from every bottle sold, that equates to 50p per case of 12 bottles. If as predicted this takes off, the opportunities are endless. We could easily vary the product by changing the locomotive pictured on the front of the bottle, hence creating collectibles and further new business.

(Ray Casely)

VINTAGE BUS SERVICES TO DUNSTER

We are running these again on Bank Holiday Sundays and Mondays this year and the first will run on April 12th and 13th. The services will also run as usual for Dunster Country Fair and Dunster Show.

MINERAL LINE TOUR

There are still places available on the May 16th trip which combines a WSR train trip with a conducted tour along the route and remains of the former West Somerset Mineral Railway. The conducted tour is carried out by Martyn Babb of Blue Motors of Exmoor and those who travelled on it last year were highly delighted.