



"ONLINE"



THE NEWSLETTER OF THE WEST SOMERSET RAILWAY AND THE WEST SOMERSET RAILWAY ASSOCIATION JANUARY 2010

2009 SETS NEW RECORDS FOR WSR

We knew by the end of November that we had already passed the previous record for number of passengers carried in a calendar year but 2009 has set a new record by quite a considerable margin. At the end of December 31st we had carried 226,737 passengers. This compares with 203,996 in 2008 and 213,423 in the previous record year of 2007.

Quite simply this is a major achievement at a time of economic uncertainty and reflects enormous credit on everyone connected with the West Somerset Railway. There would not have been a rise of some 70,000 in the annual passenger figures in ten years if it was not for the work that has gone into attracting people to the WSR and then offering a product when they get here which encourages them to come back and to pass on good reports to their friends, or in the case of coach companies to their management and planners. That is down to you and the teamwork that makes the West Somerset Railway what it is.

However the proverbial bar for 2010 has been raised to new heights and with the graph having gone back to zero at midnight on the 31st of December we have set ourselves a tough act to follow and unfortunately escalating costs mean that any assumptions that we have "cracked it" will rapidly bring major problems down about our ears. However with a proven track record and the quality of service which you bring to the equation we can look forward to the future with confidence.

Happy New Year.

(Paul Conibeare)

SECURITY

Norton site had some unwelcome visitors in late December when a van containing three men drove onto site for a snoop around. Unfortunately for them they attracted the attention of not one but two groups of volunteers and were challenged. They could give no good reason for being on site, became abusive and were clearly window shopping for scrap over the holiday break. The police and various other parties were informed and fortunately in the event nothing occurred over the holiday. However please be aware that not everyone visits the railway to look at the trains - if a stranger is acting suspiciously and you can challenge them without putting yourself in danger then find out what they are doing on the railway. However NEVER put your self at risk, simply take any details you can and report your suspicions to the MD office or the Police.

(David Holmes)

SANTA SPECIALS

We ran fewer Santa Trains in 2009 but at the end of the exercise the passenger figures were excellent, showing an increase in numbers sold from 7085 in 2008 to 7276. The major success was the Santa Expresses which showed a seat occupancy of no less than 99.9%. Thanks to everyone who turned out in some pretty unpleasant weather to keep the operation moving and successful.

OTHER CHRISTMAS TRAINS

We also saw virtually full trains for the other mainstays of the December train services, the Carol Trains and the Dunster By Candlelight operations

DEAR MR CONIBEARE,

We have been bringing our grandchildren to the WSR for the last six years to see Father Christmas. We have always enjoyed ourselves but I have to say that the trip on Sunday to Williton was the best yet!

The staff were knowledgeable and friendly and were clearly enjoying themselves. Father Christmas was superb (he had me believing!): he had time and made the effort to treat each child individually. We thought the presents were imaginative and good value and the whole thing ran very smoothly.

Congratulations on a super product: see you next year!

(Yours sincerely Bryan and Maureen Hunt.)

SPECIAL EVENTS PLANNING TEAM

The Winter Steam Festival went ahead as planned despite the wet and cold winter weather on both days that dictated our needing reliable coach steam heating and lighting throughout both days to ensure our visitors were accommodated in comfort. The need for heat meant that our "guest" locomotive 6024 "King Edward I" could only be used by herself when the tender was coupled to the coaches as she is not equipped to heat coaches when she is travelling tender first. As to visitor numbers we welcomed 1,297 over the two days compared to 2,056 carried in 2008 when the weather was cold but sunny and dry. During the event we introduced on a trial basis an electronic information system that provided from Gala Control real time information about train performance to signal boxes and stations. This system was managed by Steven Edge and Robin White and appeared to work very well from the control end but user views would be appreciated by Robin and Steven so they can provide a balanced view in their report to the next SEPT meeting scheduled towards the end of January. The question for the Team when we review the whole year's Special Events is do we continue to stage this event in future or does the Company just run an amended "Gold" timetable, your views are welcome via Justin Kerr-Peterson in the Commercial Office at Minehead.

Looking ahead to 2010 there are eleven weeks to the Spring Steam Gala and planning continues. The Gala advance publicity leaflet sadly was not available in time to distribute to visitors to the Winter Steam Gala but should be arriving at Minehead early in January at which point the usual mail shot activity will begin. However advance publicity has appeared on various websites and in the steam magazines and it is possible to book via west-somerset-railway.co.uk. Andy Forster continues to finalise contracts for British Railways Standard Class locomotives but this task is not an easy one as some promises made earlier in good faith now appear not to be sound as locomotive owners face up to their winter maintenance workload. We hope to finalise the "guest" locomotive line-up by the end of January and more details will be provided in the February edition of "Online".

Finally the Team would like to thank everyone who turned out to deliver the Winter Steam Festival so that our visitors who braved the elements to support the railway left at the end of their visit with a warm glow having been made welcome and cared for by you. Looking back, despite some problems along the way, 2009 has been a good year for Special Events and with all your help, together we believe 2010 could be even more enjoyable and memorable for all the right reasons. Thank you for all your contributions during the year and may we wish all a Happy and Rewarding New Year.

(John Cronin, Chairman SEPT)

CUTTING BACK

December's cutting back was held at Williton where the Association has leased a strip of land behind the existing Williton Restoration Offices. This strip was cleared of trees and scrub ready for the land to be fenced and reclaimed into Williton Yard. January 9th/10th will see the gang turning their attention to coppiced re-growth at Combe Florey.

(David Holmes)

EXCURSIONS

With 2009 now behind us work is already beginning on getting the word out and about to try to keep the good work going. With this in mind the Commercial Department will have representatives once again at the "Excursions" Travel Trade Show at Alexandra Palace on Saturday January 16th. This show has become increasingly popular over the four years in which we have been attending it and proves very useful in developing contacts based on the Eastern side of the country.

WSRA IT

The Association has updated its IT system with the introduction of a new server. This will allow the collection of stand alone machines at Lydeard to be replaced by a network giving better access to information. As the system is developed this will allow all areas of the Association including Williton Restorations to be linked to the same information rather than relying on the transfer of data by disc or memory stick.

(David Holmes)

DINMORE MANOR LTD NEWS

On the afternoon of Wednesday the 16th of December 2874 was loaded up at Minehead for transportation by road to our Midlands base arriving on site for unloading early the following morning. In the short term the loco will be sheeted down and protected whilst the restoration of tender T2928 is completed. DML's other recent purchase, GWR 2-8-0 No. 3845, is expected to arrive on site in June.

WSRA FINANCIAL MANAGER

The WSRA welcomes a new member of staff for the New Year - Mary Randle is to join the team as our Financial Manager. Mary will be responsible for the financial affairs of the Association and Promotions and will help us migrate our existing systems and records onto the new server.

Happy New Year!
(David Holmes)

MORNING PAUL AND GEOFF

For the first time after a number of years leaving it too late, I was able to book a place on the WSR Dunster by Candlelight with a group of neighbours on Saturday. It was a superbly organised event and one that we will recall many times in the future. Please extend our thanks to all your team, the catering staff were excellent as was the spirit of all your colleagues.

Many thanks, and looking forward to next year!
(Steve Major –Gadd Homes)

WILLITON FOOTBRIDGE NEWS

The planned surveying was carried out at Williton on a non operating day in November. There were two surveys. One of the station area and in particular the ground around where the footbridge would go. Station staff had dug pits into the ground on both sides of the line so that the sub soil could be examined. The other survey was of the steelwork of the bridge itself. We have now received the drawings which we shall need, amongst others, for the Planning authorities. The next, and slightly scary, stage, is to await an estimate of the costs from a South Wales firm who are used to such work. We shall find out how much more we need to raise to complete at least the first stage of erection. (Almost certainly an appeal).

In the New Year we shall display copies of the plans, probably in Williton Up Waiting Shelter, together with a picture of the 1874 footbridge to which this ex Trowbridge bridge will be the successor, and in the same position.

For those who are interested in the work, particularly bridges, which our consulting engineers Cass Hayward LLP of Chepstow do, look up Cass Hayward's website on the internet.

(Chris van den Arend)

DIESEL NEWS

December was the traditional “quiet” month at Williton Diesel Depot as many of our regular team of volunteers were busy elsewhere at weekends on family duties during the run-up to Christmas. On the evening of Saturday 12th the Group held our Christmas Social evening in the Wyndham Arms in Williton which was attended by a total of 25 people including some wives and partners and a good time was enjoyed by all. Many thanks to the Wyndham Team for laying on a superb meal and making us very welcome.

At the Depot some jobs have been progressed including improving security of our locomotives as best we can following reports of thefts from diesel locomotives on other preserved railway sites. Tidying up our portion of the Williton South Yard has continued and more items have been identified as surplus to our future requirements so they can either be sold on if we can find a buyer or scrapped.

During the Winter Steam Gala the Depot was open to visitors on both days and we saw a steady trickle of people wanting to have a look behind the scenes. The depot was again host to Gala Control and during the event our new internet connection was used to provide up-to-the minute running information to stations and signal boxes along the line. A decision as to whether this system is adopted for future Galas will be taken early in the New Year once all the feedback of users has been digested.

The Company service locomotive is Class 25 D7523 that has seen some usage on engineering train duties during the month. The designated back-up this winter is Class 47 D1661 “North Star” as we plan to withdraw Class 08 D3462 for an exam and some deferred repairs once the main timetable service ends on January 3rd. Our two freight vehicles regularly used in the Company Heritage Freight Train, brake van B952527 and “vanwide” box van B784676 have been withdrawn for repair and repaint. Agreement has been reached with the Company that we can use the Company Bay in No. 4 road in the Works currently occupied by the support coach for “Braunton” to do this work on the basis the vehicles will be ready and made available in good time for the Spring Steam Gala. On this basis materials have been ordered and the vehicles will go into the Works on the first non-service weekend in January as part of a planned shunt at Williton.

Finally the departure of Class 33 D6575 to Bishops Lydeard for onward movement by road for repair has been deferred until early March 2010 as contracts are not yet in place with the repairers.

(John Cronin – Chairman DEPG)

WILLITON WORKS

The Works was closed over the Xmas and New Year period, re-opening on 4 January with Ray Waldron as acting Works Manager for the time being. The workshop will normally be open Monday-Saturday inc. each week day time hours only. Should access be required at other times by WN or other group volunteers arrangements will need to be made with Ray via 01984 633547.

(Mike Johns)

MORE DUNSTER BY CANDLELIGHT THANKS.

We all just wanted to say a “big thank-you” to all the team on duty last Friday evening.

We really enjoyed our evening out and so glad the train did not leave the station until Gavin had boarded! He had to drive from Bridport to Taunton and the traffic that evening was terrible!!

Please pass on our thanks and we look forward to travelling on WSR next spring.

(Heather Bray)

MINEHEAD SLEEPING CAR

After a decade and a half of taking care of the Volunteer Accommodation in the Mark 3 Sleeping Car at Minehead Don Harris is stepping down from keeping it clean and tidy and booking people in and out. Many thanks go to Don for the conscientious way he has carried out the job, particularly when circumstances have meant that access keys have been required at short notice. If you would be interested in taking on the job of looking after the coach and handling the keys please contact Paul Conibeare on 01643 700388 or via paul.gm@wsrail.net.

CHANGING OF THE STATION MASTERS

As we go into 2010 we are looking at major changes in the list of Station Masters along the line. As previously reported Walter Harris and Mike Hodge are formally stepping down from Crowcombe Heathfield at the end of this month and Chris and Colin Dowrick are also relinquishing the reins at Dunster. In both cases this is the end of an era as their connections with the respective stations go back to the pioneering days of the 1970's. Photographs of the line in those days compared with comparative views taken today will show just how much Walter, Mike, Chris and Colin have achieved during their periods in office and how much of a debt the WSR owes them. We wish them well for the future.