



"ONLINE"



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

A VERY SUCCESSFUL AUGUST – THANK YOU

Although the Railway has been successful in recent years in developing extra business on the shoulders of the main season we reflect the general pattern of the British Tourist Trade in that August is a crucial month to the overall outcome of the year. So it is very pleasing to be able to report that at the end of the month our passenger figure for the year to date stood at 167,041 compared with 145,631 at the same point of 2008. Making comparison with our record year of 2007 we are still ahead of that year's total of 155,523.

None of this could have been achieved without a major effort by all of the volunteers and staff who worked through the long days of the Yellow Timetable period from July 22nd to August 31st. At times it seemed as though some of the familiar faces were never going home at all but I hope that you will feel that the outcome justifies the work put in. On behalf of myself and the Boards of the Association and Company, very many thanks.

(Paul Conibeaere)

2009 STEAM RALLY PROVES THE SUITABILITY OF THE RALLY SITE

This years Rally has proved the suitability of the Norton Triangle Site as a perfect Show Ground.

Work carried out by the Rally committee many of whom have spent long hours preparing the site, has resulted in a very entertaining Rally, where we appear to have satisfied the exhibitors, traders, and most importantly our visitors.

The opening of the Norton Station was a major milestone in the history of both the West Somerset Railway and Association, but has made the Rally site unique in having a railway station.

Despite having had some rain on the Saturday visitor numbers were very encouraging, but once the rain disappeared we found Sunday to be a fantastic day, visitor numbers being greater than expected.

The Rally can only be successful by the hard work of the Rally Committee together with all those who gave their time over the weekend. To you all a sincere thank you for your support and we look forward to greater success in 2010

The 2010 Rally will be on the 7th & 8th August, please make a note in your diary.
(Humphrey Davies Chairman Rally Committee)

CROWCOMBE HEATHFIELD OPEN DAY

Despite morning showers, the Open Day at Crowcombe Heathfield Station on 30 July was declared a great success. The sun did arrive and so did a fair number of visitors who enjoyed a wonderful display of Hornby O Gauge models; talks and demonstrations by Station Staff; a generous draw; and, of course, the famous food on offer at the Station. A handsome income was generated. The Station Group now have sufficient funds to install the new lamp post and to update the platform lighting which was installed over 25 years ago.

WILLITON WORKS

This month the welcome news is that Gareth Winter is resuming as Engineering Manager from 1 September having had 4 weeks well earned leave. This change of affairs follows a series of meetings and discussions within the Association when Gareth was able to put the issues that had led to his resignation, some of which have been resolved. He now has to bring himself up to date with the work on hand.

Good progress has been made with the refurbishing of the latest batch of mechanical signalling equipment from Network Rail.

1. BRAUNTON

Following intensive work by Gareth and the support team the previous weekend 34046 was passed fit for service on Tues.25 Aug. and ran light engine to Bishops Lydeard the next morning ready to take up WSR duties. It returns to Williton after

the Bank Holiday to be made ready for a planned visit to the MidHants Railway. It is due to be moved by rail, towed in light steam from Bishops Lydeard, on 8 Sept. provided it passes main line inspection the day before, and due to return from Ropley on 15 Sept.

Work has continued on the tender with the manufacture and fitting of new horn stays and various items of brake gear, and with the preparation for painting of the new tank. Further preparatory painting work and floor repairs have also been done on the Support Coach.

2. 6960 "RAVENINGHAM HALL"

With Braunton away for a few days the opportunity was taken to bring the chassis into the workshop under the crane to remove the new ash pan and the cab roof and front plate. Sections of angle have been cut and drilled for fitting to the underside of the firebox foundation ring in preparation for fitting the ash pan.

The boiler barrel crinolines are almost finished while sufficient details are to hand for those on the firebox to be made up. Cladding sheets have been cleaned, examined and repaired where needed prior to undercoating. Some modified Hall class drawings have now been obtained from the GWS at Didcot including details for fitting the smokebox temporarily to the boiler prior to the whole assembly being lifted on to the chassis.

(Mike Johns)

SPECIAL EVENTS

The next Special Event this year is the Autumn Steam Gala that has been designed to have a distinctly Great Western Railway flavour as we begin a year of celebrations to mark the 175th Anniversary in 2010 of the birth of the Great Western Railway Company, leading on to the establishment of the Swindon Works. In recognition of those celebrations we have christened the Autumn Gala "GWR 175 – The Prelude" as this Gala will mark the start of those celebrations and we have secured the hire of seven GWR designed locomotives to complement our own four locos to give us a total of eleven engines in steam during the four days between Thursday 1st October and Sunday 4th October. In addition there will be a further two former Great Western locomotives at Minehead Locomotive Works and four more at Williton Works either being restored or stored unserviceable. Those at Minehead can be viewed on the Saturday and Sunday as the Locomotive Depot is open to visitors but sadly most of those at Williton will be out of sight inside the Works which is not opening on this occasion for operational reasons. Thus, in total, there will be seventeen former GWR locomotives resident on the WSR during the Gala and we suspect that this is some sort of record for a Heritage Steam Railway.

As ever we have calculated our likely coaching needs and have decided that we have insufficient serviceable Mark I coaches available to us to satisfy the demand for seats on trains during the Gala so we have negotiated the long term hire of four dual brake, dual heat MKI TSO vehicles from Riviera Trains that will remain on the Railway for a minimum of two years. Each time we use them will cost the Railway a fee but for the major Special Events we recognise the need and this arrangement will help fill the gap until the Railway acquires additional vehicles and both the Railway and the Association progress the overhaul of existing vehicles they own which are stored unserviceable at Minehead. As part of the deal the Company have to find somewhere to store an additional eight vehicles for a fortnight including the Gala period so things are going to be more than a bit restricted at Bishops Lydeard and Minehead.

After the Autumn Steam Gala the next Special Event is three weeks later on Saturday 24th and Sunday 25th October when we will stage the last "Somerset in autumn" Gala. At this point in time we have still to finalise the locomotive line-up that will be a mix of mainly home-based steam and diesel traction with the possibility of at least one visiting steam locomotive in service. In 2010 this two day Special Event will be staged on Saturday and Sunday 5th September when there should be no requirement for the train heating that can be needed at the end of October and cannot be provided by DEPG diesels.

Finally on Tuesday 29th and Wednesday 30th December we plan to stage our second two day Winter Steam Festival that is being planned to take us all back to a Great Western Railway Branch line in winter in days long ago. Budgets permitting, we hope to have at least one visiting GWR branch line engine to complement the home fleet. Looking further ahead we have identified by class and painted (or cabside plate) number all the steam and diesel locomotives we plan to invite as guests to our Railway for the five Special Events we plan in 2010 to celebrate GWR175. The first of those is the Spring Steam Gala to be held over six days on Saturday 20th and Sunday 21st March followed by Thursday 25th to Sunday 28th March inclusive. The chosen theme for this event will be the British Railways Standard Class locomotives that of course the former Swindon Works of the GWR was deeply involved with in terms of design, development, construction and testing of. To operate the planned Gala Working timetable we need a minimum of eight "Standards" and with none based at Minehead it means that all will be visiting locomotives that will significantly increase the "up front" cost of the event. However we believe the planned line-up of locomotives will be a "first" in heritage railway terms and should be a great attraction to the many supporters of heritage steam. We had hoped to make this our first "Chimney First" Special Event using both the turntable at Minehead and the triangle at Norton Fitzwarren to turn locomotives at both ends of the line but sadly the triangle will not be ready in time so that exciting development will have to wait for another day.

But for now it is back to the present on a cold and Grey Bank Holiday Monday morning with the Autumn Steam Gala four weeks away. Time to ask you all to join in with us in trying to raise the awareness of what we plan for “GWR 175 – The Prelude” by spreading the message to family, friends, neighbours and work colleagues, our target is to better the 5,715 visitor total of last year to increase the funding available to SEPT in 2010. Your support is essential and much appreciated by the Special Events Team. Thank you.

(John Cronin-Chairman SEPT)

CIVIL ENGINEERING DEPARTMENT NEWS

1. IRIS II - has gone to pastures new. The former BR Technical Centre research vehicle was originally a private purchase by Chief Civil Engineer John Buxton that was then effectively loaned at no cost to the railway with the intention of providing better C.E. Department staff facilities (e.g. messing, drying, washing etc) at Winter Programme work sites. In addition it also had the opportunity for private charter potential for the railway during the summer months, again at no cost. However, changes in Company Board policy towards it have now dictated that it has had to find a new home and a new use. A minibus and the trackside are not as attractive alternative facilities, but perhaps they fit the rugged and tough PW image! It is understood that IRIS II may now be converted to become a director's inspection saloon at the Barry Railway in South Wales.
2. TRACK MATTERS - Dunster Marsh was a challenge to build a railway across in the first place and that challenge is still reflected today in maintaining the track in good condition. The GWR's District Civil Engineer at Taunton had the foresight in the late 1930's to relay much of the Minehead to Dunster section with steel sleepers in order to minimise the weight that the formation was required to support. Allied to this one would also not have seen the large and heavy locomotives running over this section that we do now. The most recent problem that has reoccurred has been in the vicinity of Seaward Way Level Crossing, where the track has been sinking between the crossing and the culvert on the Dunster side. The crossing is a fixed point which is lower than the culvert and hence a trial pit was dug over the top of the culvert to see what scope there might be to lower the track at this location. The answer was unfortunately none and plan B involved lifting, packing and slewing to try to achieve the best compromise in the circumstances prevailing given the hard high spot over the culvert. We did of course ensure that this very physical work was implemented on two of the warmest days of the year so far!

3. STOGUMBER – A number of repair items have recently been attended to at Stogumber Station in partnership with the RAMS team. We have installed some new platform fence posts to replace those that have snapped; made good platform surface subsidence that had created trip hazards; removed a storm damaged broken tree branch that was hanging over the path and also unblocked the foul drainage system – yes we are not just PWay ! RAMS are installing the new fence pales and are taking on the external timber work and guttering repairs to the station building. Upon completion of this work they have also volunteered to re-paint the building. This has proved, yet again, that we are only keep the railway's buildings in the condition that they are because of such examples of excellent teamwork – many thanks are due in this case to John Baines and the RAMS team.

(Tony Phillips)

GWR LAMP POST SAVED

An original 1900s Great Western Railway lamp post from St Ives has been saved for use on the West Somerset Railway. Volunteers from the Railway came to St Ives on 11 August to recover the post which has lurked unloved and unwanted in the undergrowth alongside a footpath near St Ives Railway Station for the last 40 years. Robin White, from the WSR, said: "We are very grateful to the town of St Ives for donating this item to us. Original Great Western Railway items such as this are a vital part of presenting an era of more elegant travel which requires more than just our wonderful steam locomotives to create the full picture. The lamp post will be installed at our station at Bishops Lydeard near Taunton." Volunteers from the West Somerset Railway and St Ives Museum worked together on recovery of the lamppost.

DIESEL NEWS

August has proved to be a busy month for our DEPG Williton Team as we have provided diesel locomotives each weekend for service mainly working the Saturday 1125 hrs. Bishops Lydeard diagram. For the first weekend of the month we provided two locomotives, Class 14 "Teddy Bear" D9526 to cover the 0935 hrs. Bishops Lydeard Saturday and Sunday DMU diagram and Class 35 "Hymek" D7017 to cover the 1125 hrs Bishops Lydeard Saturday diagram. Having two diesel hydraulics in service on the branch brought back memories of Summer Saturdays on former GWR branch lines forty plus years ago at the end of British Railways (Western Region) steam era with the "Hymek" stirring memories of the Saturdays Only London Paddington services whilst the "Teddy Bear" was in charge of the

branch locals as cover for the DMU that was redeployed to provide an intensive Bishops Lydeard to Norton Fitzwarren Platform service for the Association Steam Fayre. The second Saturday of the month saw the "Hymek" again in service whilst back at Williton Diesel Depot the final touches were being applied to Class 33 "Crompton" D6566 ready for her starring role hauling a Wedding Reception service planned for the following Saturday.

On the day D6566 worked light engine from Williton to Minehead so the final cleaning and polishing could be completed in the bay platform before the traditional white ribbon was attached and the commemorative headboard fitted. With the tyres painted white and buffers polished she looked the part reminiscent of Bristol Bat Road Depot "Royal" Class 47 locomotives in days past. With the locomotive ready the DEPG team were redeployed to clean the exterior of the carriage windows of the three coaches chosen to form the Wedding Reception Special. Much elbow grease and energy was expended in the struggle to remove the built-up road grime on the window exteriors that cannot be easily removed by just washing with soap and water. Eventually the work was done and the windows on those three coaches sparkled as the Catering Team led by WSR Catering and Hospitality Manager Jacqui Green put the finishing touches to the wedding feast prior to the arrival of the newly-weds Anne and Dick Holland and their guests. To allow these final preparations to be undertaken properly on the Saturday morning Class 47 D1661 "North Star" was used to work the 1125 hrs Bishops Lydeard to Minehead leg of the diagram. On arrival in the main platform at Minehead D1661 was detached and sent light engine home to Williton Diesel Depot, her work for the day done. Then D6566 shunted the three coach Reception portion to the main platform that was attached to the five coaches from Bishops Lydeard to form the 1405 hrs Minehead service. The wedding party led by Anne and Dick arrived in good time for photographs to be taken by D6566 before they all joined the train ready to start the wedding breakfast and the locomotive and first three coaches looked a picture in the sunshine as the train left Minehead.

After the excitement of the wedding weekend it was back to normal on the fourth Saturday of the month when Class 42 "Warship" D832 "Onslaught" was used to work the 1125 hrs Bishops Lydeard diagram and a large turn out of diesel hydraulic enthusiast visitors was seen enjoying the "Maybach Music" once again in the Quantock Hills. For the Bank Holiday Saturday D6566 was again employed on the 1125 hrs diagram and following that turn she remained berthed at Bishops Lydeard in service as the Company Contract Service Locomotive whilst Class 25 D7523 has been recalled to Williton Diesel Dept for attention following an underframe inspection at Bishops Lydeard earlier in the month. Thankfully all the DEPG locomotives employed during the month performed well and were much appreciated by many visitors to judge by the feedback the crews received on the day.

Back at Williton Diesel Depot work progresses slowly on the rebuild of a Maybach MD655 engine for Class 52 "Western" D1010 "Western Campaigner" whilst a number of other ongoing projects have been progressed. On the evening of the Bank Holiday Saturday the annual DEPG late summer BBQ was held in the Main Shed and those who were able to attend enjoyed a traditional feast prepared and cooked by Julie and Paul Tucker who we once again thank for their loyal support.

Looking ahead D7017 will be in service again on Saturday 12th September during the CAMRA Beer Festival and then the diesels are rested until the end of October when two or three will be employed during the "Somerset in Autumn" Gala on October 24th and 25th. For both of the Autumn October Galas the DEPG Williton Diesel Depot and Heritage Diesel Visitor Centre will be open everyday to visitors who are welcome to view our premises and inspect our Heritage Diesel locomotives berthed in the Shed, the Heritage Centre and the Depot South Yard. Visitors will also be able to view and visit the cab of the standby steam locomotive berthed in the Diesel Depot South Yard during the Autumn Steam Gala and enjoy good hot food and drinks either from the station catering outlet or from a mobile catering unit sited by the Visitor Centre.

Exciting times ahead, fingers crossed that the weather will be kind to us again and we can all enjoy another West Somerset Railway Special Event. Please remember our gates will be open at Williton and all are welcome.

(John Cronin)

SOMERSET BRANCH OF CAMPAIGN FOR REAL ALE HOLD 10th ANNIVERSARY BEER FESTIVAL AT MINEHEAD STATION ON SEPTEMBER 12th and 13th.

It was in September 1999 that the Somerset Branch of the Campaign For Real Ale (CAMRA) relocated their annual Beer Festival to the platform of Minehead Railway Station on the West Somerset Railway. The new venue has proved so popular since that the event will be celebrating its tenth anniversary on September 12th and 13th.

During the decade the number of independent brewers in Somerset has continued to increase to the point where the county now has one of the highest numbers of small breweries in Britain. It will be these local products that feature most prominently and visitors cannot help but be impressed by the remarkable range of styles and tastes that traditional British brewing can offer in an age of increasing standardisation of drinks and foods. The range will be further enhanced by the products of some other breweries from further afield and visitors can expect bitters, fruit beers, stouts, honey beers, milds, India pale ales and other styles to be on sale, plus some Anniversary Festival Specials. There will be some cider and perry and also soft drinks on sale and food will also be available.

Entertainment will be provided on Saturday night by "The Boys from Melbourne Street" and Sunday lunchtime features a return by the "Tone Valley Jazz Band." The bar staff will all be volunteers from CAMRA.

Opening hours are 11 a.m. to 11 p.m. on the Saturday with the West Somerset Railway running extra trains in the evening and midday to 4 p.m. on the Sunday.

WSRA LAUNCHES 2009 RECRUITMENT DRIVE

The West Somerset Railway Association today launched the 2009 Membership Drive. A small leaflet encouraging visitors to join the West Somerset Railway Association will be widely distributed across the Railway in the booking offices, on the trains, in shops and at the stations. All of the leaflets are coded so that when returned to the Association Office, it will be possible to determine where the new members were recruited. The WSRA plan this drive to run for the next four weeks, and then will measure the results. The new membership forms can be handed in at any of the stations, or posted to the Association Office in Bishops Lydeard Station. Working members and supporters alike are asked to help by encouraging visitors to pick up one of these leaflets, join the Association, and return again to enjoy their benefits! And of course, a PDF [1Mb] version of the leaflet is available.

CRASH EXERCISE AT WOOLSTON MOOR

A car and a steam train have been used to simulate a crash scene on a level crossing. The "crash", at Woolston saw crews from the emergency services crews help rescue three "casualties". The train was not carrying passengers. A spokesman for the operation, Williton watch manager Gary Austin-Thompson, said: "The purpose of the exercise was to familiarise crews with the dangers involved when working in close proximity to steam trains. Williton [fire] station has liaised on several occasions with West Somerset Railway regarding several near misses at railway crossings, where drivers have gone around the barriers in order to beat the trains. The exercise aimed to raise awareness of the dangers of steam trains and car collision.

ANOTHER INTERESTING TALK ABOUT THE BROAD GAUGE

A further fascinating and highly-acclaimed talk at Flax Bourton by a leading expert in the Broad Gauge. "A Broad Gauge Journey from Exeter to Penzance and Beyond" - an Illustrated Talk by Canon Brian Arman at Flax Bourton Village Hall, Monday 12 October 2009 at 7.30pm. All monies raised will go towards the work of the parish

churches of Barrow Gurney and Flax Bourton. Tickets, including refreshments, £8.00 for further information please call 01275 463336 or 01275 461179. For those looking for a connection - the Lamp Hut now at Crowcombe Heathfield was formerly at Flax Bourton Station.

WSRA TAUNTON MEETINGS

The next meeting of the wsra Taunton Group will be on Monday 7th September at the usual time of 7.45 pm. I shall be pleased to welcome back the speaker, Mr Ron White who has developed the Colour-Rail business in archival rail photos (mainly UK steam) over many years. He has been trying to find someone to take over the business for some while, as he wishes to retire, and I am very pleased to learn that a well-known railway photographer, Paul Chancellor, will be taking over care of this superb collection in a few months' time. Ron White tells me that this is to be the last talk that he will give, as usual illustrated by a selection of slides from his large library.

Ron White is known for his humorous observations on British railway operation, not least over matters in which the GWR liked to be slightly 'different!' I always enjoy his humorous displays, and I hope that the meeting will be, once again, well supported.

The meeting will be held at the usual venue, the GWRSA 'snug' bar at the north east corner of Taunton Station.

I look forward to seeing many of you there on Monday September 7th.

(Peter Darke)

VISIT BY PAUL ATTERBURY TO MINEHEAD

One of the regular experts from BBCI's "Antiques Roadshow" visited Minehead on Tuesday 25th August. Ceramics expert Paul Atterbury also has a long term interest in railway sand canals, having published number of books on both subjects and he was at the northern end of the line to judge the entry for the turntable into the National Railway Heritage Awards. He was given a conducted tour of the site and an explanation of the project as a whole and the Railway's plans for the future.

NEXT COACH OUTING FROM BLUE MOTORS

This is a trip to the Swanage Railway on September 12th and details can be obtained from Dave Johnson via 01643 708385.