



THE PLATFORM

THE OFFICIAL E-NEWSLETTER OF THE WEST SOMERSET RAILWAY

Second Series No. 2, April 2024



Not your average Saturday morning! Ex-GW Hall class locomotive No. 6990 Witherslack Hall at the head of a special charter service for long distance runners with the "Steaming to the Coast" running event organised by Channel Events on Saturday 20th April. The train left Minehead at 0830 and ran through to Bishops Lydeard, where those running the full length back to Minehead (26.2 miles) left the train and commenced their run. The train then ran back towards Minehead, with runners alighting at Williton (11 miles to Minehead) and Washford (11 km to Minehead). It is hoped to repeat this event in future years.

[Photo: West Somerset Railway PLC]

In this issue...

| | | | |
|-----------------------------------|--------|---------------------------------|---------|
| From the Chairman | Page 2 | External funding | Page 7 |
| Welcome to 6435 | Page 2 | Strategic Outline Business Case | Page 8 |
| Sales and Marketing | Page 3 | WSRA News | Page 9 |
| Steam gala: late update | Page 4 | WSRHT News | Page 10 |
| Infrastructure | Page 6 | DEPG News | Page 12 |
| Diesel Multiple Unit (DMU) Update | Page 6 | HRA Spring Conference | Page 15 |
| Stations News | Page 7 | | |

From the Chairman

The railway runs regular timetabled trains for nearly nine months in the year. The end of March brings to an end the winter 'gap' in our services, so for all of us to see trains running again is a clear sign that a new railway year has begun. As I have said before, there is a huge amount of essential work taking place during the winter and, in one sense, it is by no means a winter "break". Staff and volunteers have been working extremely hard to make sure that the running season is as successful as it possibly can be.

Heritage railways like ours measure their success in a number of ways, including passenger numbers, feedback from passengers and also whether the business is financially sound. Although the PLC is not for profit, it is crucial that we make enough money to continue as a 'going concern'. Nationally – and indeed internationally – heritage railways are faced with substantial rising costs, and our passengers, by and large, have to be very careful how they spend their 'non-essential' funds. So, during the winter season our team have been working very hard to ensure we are as well placed as possible to maintain and enhance our viability. It is salutary to remember that the West Somerset Railway has very rarely, in its various guises including under British Railways, made a profit.

We believe we are better placed than many heritage railways, but we cannot be complacent. The readers of this newsletter are, in a sense, the "front line" of our supporters, and I would urge you all to come and ride the railway this year, and to encourage your relations, friends, work colleagues and neighbours to do the same! I know you won't be disappointed. (And, as an aside, even if you qualify for a reduced fare, or even a free ticket, come anyway, you might be surprised by the amount everyone spends on teas, coffees, souvenirs and so on!).

Finally, I want to reiterate my thanks to everyone who has helped, and continues to contribute to making the railway the success that it is. So, thank you all, and I look forward to seeing you on or about the railway.

Jonathan Jones-Pratt

West Somerset Railway PLC Chairman



Welcome to 6435

Ex-Great Western Railway 0-6-0 pannier tank 6435 has now arrived on the West Somerset from the Bodmin and Wenford Railway and, at the time of writing, is stored in the head-shunt at Minehead, overlooking the sea-front, where it has generated a lot of interest. 6435 has been bought by WSR Chairman, Jonathan Jones-Pratt, for use on the West Somerset, along with BR(W) autococh number 232. Full details of both loco and auto-trailer were given in the news item in the last issue of The Platform. 6435 is now in the queue for full restoration, to take place at Williton.

Also in the picture is the larger BR(WR) pannier tank no. 9466 (also owned by Jonathan) which is currently in use on the railway.

[Photo: Frank Courtney]

Sales and Marketing

Sam White Sales and Marketing Manager writes...

The Easter school holidays have been a success seeing many visitors to our wonderful railway. As part of our encouragement to children and families we ran a dinosaur trail for children to spot dinosaurs at each station which has been very well received. The idea of our children-specific events is to generate a level of interest from a younger demographic and to enhance the experience for families.

Our first event for the year was the Roar and Explore event which saw Dinosaurs visit Minehead station, luckily the weather held out for the most part, which enabled the dinosaurs to stay outside the station limits offering a safe and contained area for passengers to visit the dinosaurs with enough space to keep a distance from them, if children were a little afraid (or if the dinosaurs felt like more breakfast – Ed) The event was a great success and saw many people visit the railway to travel or to just visit the station which is all great exposure for the railway.

Minehead Station Master, Robin Wichard and companion at the Roar and Explore Event [Photo: West Somerset Railway



We are looking forward to welcoming the *Steaming to the Coast* event to the railway on 20th April. *Steaming to the Coast* is organised by Channel Events and will see entrants ride the steam train along the line from Minehead to Bishops Lydeard to take part in a running event. There are three distances to choose from where they can run 11 km, 11 miles or a full marathon. Tickets for the *Steaming to the Coast* are sold out and we will be running normal services alongside this. (See photo on Page 1)

The next upcoming event is the *Spring Steam Spectacular* which is taking place on 3rd – 6th May 2024, which will see visiting engines including LNER B1 4-6-0 no.61306 *Mayflower*, LNWR 0-6-2 'Coal Tank' no.1054 visiting courtesy of the Bahamas Locomotive Society, GWR 66XX 0-6-2 tank no.6695 and BR(W) 6959 Class no.6990 *Witherslack Hall*. We will have an extensive timetable running and additional attractions such as an evening photo shoot on Sunday 5th May at Minehead Station and goods brake van rides. Tickets for the Spring Steam Spectacular are available to purchase now through our website www.west-somerset-railway.co.uk. More detail on the next page.

For all upcoming events please visit the West Somerset Railways website www.west-somerset-railway.co.uk

Steam Gala

Late Update from Seb Walsh, Gala Team Chairman

The Spring Steam Spectacular is fast approaching now, and final preparations are being made to ensure this event will be a success for our Railway. The dates of the event are Friday 3rd May to Bank Holiday Monday 6th May.

As you may have already heard from other sources, unfortunately GWR 28XX no.2807 has had to withdraw from appearing at the event, due to some repairs becoming necessary to the locomotive. We are grateful to the Cotswold Steam Preservation Ltd for the hire offer and we hope we can see the engine visit in the future.



Spring Gala guest loco LNWR 'Coal Tank' 0-6-2T no 1054 basks in the Somerset sun at Westridge on 20 April 2024.

© Ben Grellier

It is not all bad news though, and we are very grateful to the Great Central Railway and David Clarke Railway Trust for them stepping in to provide a replacement. We are pleased to reveal that BR(W) Modified Hall Class no.6990 'Witherslack Hall' will be operating at the Spring Steam Spectacular. Quite the replacement engine, I hope you agree. No.6990 last visited the WSR in 2018, when she double-headed with then resident no.6960 'Raveningham Hall'. This time around will see 'Witherslack Hall' paired up with our Manor no.7828 'Odney Manor' on several trains throughout the event. Usually being based at the GCR in the Midlands, this will be a rare opportunity to see no.6990 back on firm Western territory. Thank you again to the Great Central for helping us out at short notice. No.6990 has already arrived at Bishops Lydeard and is working some service trains before the event.

And that's not all for last minute visitors! We are excited to reveal that the final guest engine for the event will be Hunslet 0-6-0ST no.1873 'Jessie'! This plucky little engine will be visiting the WSR for the first time at this event, courtesy of the Blaenavon Heritage Railway and owner Mike Pearce. She was built for use in a steelworks in Cardiff, where she spent her entire working life shunting huge wagons full of molten steel around the site. She started out her preserved life on display outside in a children's play park in Cardiff, before being purchased by her current owner and restored. Having gone through a recent period running as our favourite cheeky little blue number 1 tank engine, she has now reverted to original appearance and regained her saddle tank and original steelworks livery. You won't miss this at the event with the distinctive wasp stripes visible from a mile off! Following the event the engine will be repainted so this is the final opportunity to see her in these colours.

This makes the Gala Line-up below:

- BR(W) 6959 Modified Hall 4-6-0 no.6990 'Witherslack Hall'
- LNER B1 4-6-0 no.61306 'Mayflower'
- LNWR Coal Tank 0-6-2T no.1054
- GWR 66XX 0-6-2T no.6695
- Hunslet Works 0-6-0ST no.1873 'Jessie'
- BR(W) 94XX Pannier Tank no.9466
- BR(W) 78XX Manor 4-6-0 no.7828
- WSR Mogul 2-6-0 no.9351

LNWR 4-6-0 no 61306 *Mayflower* arrived by rail on 20 April 2024 and seen here at Barnstaple Junction.

© Malcolm Anderson



In addition to the loco line-up changes above, we have been able to confirm details of some of the side attractions at the event. Brakevan Ride tickets are on sale on our website and spaces for our evening photographic shoot with the four tank engines working at the event plus static no.6435, have also been put up for sale. Shunting demonstrations have been confirmed and will take place at Minehead and Washford at different times during the day on Friday, Saturday and Monday. Engines will be on static display up and down the line including mainline performer no.34046 'Braunton' at Bishops Lydeard (Sun only). No.80064 and no.4561 will be on display outside at Williton throughout the event, and we will have WSR Chairman Jon Jones-Pratt's latest acquisition, GWR Pannier Tank no.6435, on display at Minehead.

Hopefully by the time you read this, the event timetable will have been published on our website. Some highlights include:

- Plenty of double-heading (all 4 days)
- Goods Trains with Brakevan Rides (all four days)
- Local Parcels Set working BL to WN (Friday & Monday)
- Local Passenger Set working BL to WN on Saturday
- Local Passenger Set working MD to WN on Sunday
- Turntable and Triangle in use to allow as many full-line trains to be smokebox first as possible (all four days)
- Pick-up Goods trains with shunting at Minehead and Washford (Friday, Saturday & Monday)
- Long formed Goods train (Friday night & Saturday morning)
- Semi fast express trains (all four days)
- Non stop run MD to BL (Sunday eve only)

With all of the above appearing, we can't wait to see you either visiting or volunteering at the event. Tickets are currently available to pre-book, and in doing so you will save against the on-the-day fares. An offer only available online in advance is our 'Kids for a Quid' deal, where on purchase of a full price Adult rover, a child's ticket can be added for only £1. This offer is only available on tickets for Sunday 5th and Monday 6th May. See you there!

Infrastructure

Phil Young from the Infrastructure Department reports as follows:

It's been a busy time over the winter for the infrastructure department, with work focussed on a number of areas. We wanted to really get on top of the lineside, so a large amount of flailing has taken place, in order to make the job of our various lineside clearance teams easier. As well as the existing volunteer cutting back gangs, the autumn saw the formation of a new gang who have really shown their worth. Anyone driving in the area between Eastcombe and Tribble Bridge will hopefully notice the vast improvement in visibility of the line from the road. This work also enabled us to have a look at the culvert where Back Stream runs under the line, which had become largely inaccessible due to the undergrowth. As well as this there has been a particular focus on cutting back around crossing points on the line, with the aim of improving sighting and visibility, both for users and train crews.

The other big event of the winter was the work to rectify the landslip near Tribble Bridge. This was a major project, and we are very grateful to the contractors TWL Groundworks for their sterling work. The new retaining wall for the embankment really shows off their craftsmanship. We were pleased to be able to remove the 5mph temporary speed restriction in time for the start of the operating season.

Work then moved on to the rectification of several "wet beds" from various areas. This occurs when the ballast packing under the sleepers becomes dislodged over time, allowing them to "pump" as trains pass over them. This allows water to settle in them over time. Once they have been dug out, they can be re-ballasted, and with the use of hand tamping machines, re packed so the ballast does its job of holding the sleepers in place. At the same time several Tie-Bars have been removed; these are put in place to prevent "gauge spread", where the distance between rails starts to expand.

Lastly, we've run several Tidy-Trains. These go out to pick up and remove the leftover detritus from the cutting back activity, all part of the efforts to make the lineside as neat and tidy as we can, ready for a busy operating season ahead!

Diesel Multiple Unit (DMU) Update

Olly Wise DMU Technical Supervisor writes...

Many readers will know that the DMU has languishing unused – but not unloved! We can now report that the DMU is undergoing some changes and will receive some new investment. Currently the ex-North London Lines Network South East Class 117 DMBS vehicle 51354 is undergoing commissioning testing and subsequent repairs in order to be compliant with the WSR's Maintenance and Overall policy and to bring the unit into service after being stored out of service for a number of years. Such items as air receivers are required overhaul in order to be legally compliant. Roof leaks are requiring some attention to preserve the cab and guards' interiors from damage, as well as engine fire system recommissioning.

Moving forward the desired plan is to utilise 51354 to replace Class 115 DMBS vehicle 51859 and create a serviceable set to operate this summer with 59678 TCL and 51880 DMBS. Meantime a significant overhaul plan has been written for 51859, which will be subject to costs and associated funding which would bring this vehicle to a refurbished standard.

The DMU in service at Dunster, back in November 2016.

[Photo: Mike Waters]



Stations News

Alan Smithers Stations Co-ordinator writes:

In 2023, the railway reintroduced Railway Chaplains, and by the time you read this, they will have become familiar faces around the railway in general, but perhaps more prominently, around the stations. We currently have three Chaplains, each covering a section of the railway.

The role of the Chaplains is to offer a pastoral presence within the railway community, especially amongst staff and volunteers. They are always ready to meet people where they are and to be a ready listener and offer spiritual leadership and to respond to questions of faith as appropriate. They are impartial, and will never assume or impose any faith or philosophy on anyone. Essentially, they are there if you need to talk and will listen.

The role of Railway Chaplains is a historic one, dating back to the earliest days of the railway, and the Railway Mission, and are still present around the main line as well as Heritage Railways.

The West Somerset Railway has three, and for this article, I am going to introduce **Malcolm Hope**, who covers both Minehead and Dunster.

Malcolm is a Methodist Minister who has lived in Minehead for nearly 12 years. A former teacher of Mathematics, Malcolm's Church ministry began in January 1978. Since then, he has served as a chaplain in schools, a sheltered housing complex, hospitals and a hospice, and for 12 years, as an Industrial [Workplace] Chaplain with the NHS.

Malcolm's home town in the North-East of England – a seaside resort at the end of a branch line - developed upon arrival of the of the railway in the 1860's. As a terminus, it had facilities very similar to those we have at Minehead. His father managed the local Coal Depot and frequent visits to his workplace created an interest in the steam railway.

Until recently, Malcolm was a School Pastor at the West Somerset College. A former schoolboy county cricket and rugby player, he takes an interest in most sports and was particularly pleased that Newcastle United performed so well in the Premier League last year, but notes that success has come at a cost this season.

Malcolm can be found at Minehead Station on many running days and makes occasional trips down to Dunster. He's always happy to lend an unbiased ear.

Our other Chaplains are **Mike Newberry** and **Mark Phillips** and we will learn more about them in further additions.

Many thanks to Malcolm for his assistance and input into this article.

External Funding

Robin Wichard Board Adviser (External Fund Raising) writes:

I have started the process working with the General Manager to agree a package for potential corporate sponsors so that we can be consistent in what we offer them in return for sponsorship on a graduated scale from £500 to £10,000. We have also considered bespoke packages and what they might look like. An 'Information for Corporate Sponsors' brochure is being produced to follow the format of the existing 'Information for Corporate Clients' brochure. I have also agreed with Kerry what our priorities are for fund-raising - the loco shed roof at BL and renewal of the mess room and associated facilities at the MD loco shed as priorities.

The barrier to fund-raising at present is that funders like the Lottery Heritage Fund need to have a clear financial breakdown of any project they might consider funding. Work on analysing both these projects is currently being undertaken and Peter Chilcott is working on the BL loco shed costings. Quotes have been gained for the work on the volunteer accommodation coach at Blue Anchor (recently transferred to PLC ownership from the WSRA).

Several funding bodies have been approached regards the three tasks listed above but further costings will be needed as stated.

A new grant has now been made available through the 'Rural England Prosperity Fund for Somerset Businesses' which offers financial aid and practical advice to encourage energy efficiency and sustainability. Businesses can benefit from grants between £2,500 and £25,000 to cover up to 50% of eligible project costs, with a focus on reducing carbon emissions and embracing greener practices. Solar panels and similar ideas may be eligible for this but it is time limited.

A local business at Blue Anchor is interested in a sponsorship scheme whereby they would sponsor our disposable cups for a season with their logo paced on cups alongside ours. This is being explored as I write. Further talks are also taking place with local businesses about sponsoring aspects of the 40s Weekend which has had its available funds reduced due to the demise of Minehead BID who previously contributed £5,000 annually.

Strategic Outline Business Case - Reintroducing Scheduled Trains Between Bishops Lydeard and Taunton

*This note, prepared by **Steve Williams, Project Board Chairman** summarises current developments in developing a business case for the re-introduction of scheduled trains between Bishops Lydeard and Taunton. This collaborative planning work has been going on for some time and still has a long way to go, depending on the availability of funding. Nevertheless, a lot of progress has been made, and we will update readers when there is more to report.*

Many in the PLC and the wider WSR will know that, for the last 2 ½ years, we have been working on this business case to reinstate trains running between Bishops Lydeard and Taunton as part of the national timetable.

I am delighted (and relieved) to say that the draft business case is now complete and the final document will be finished by mid April. We had originally envisaged a need to do this by the end of March but the decision to hold a General Election later in the year took the pressure off the timing for any submission to avoid purdah.

The Project Board (PLC, Somerset Council, Heart of South West Local Enterprise Partnership, Great Western Railway and Network Rail) have worked particularly hard in the last six months to refine and agree the position. The preferred option is in effect a reinstatement of the shuttle service which operated as a pilot in 2019. If successful, trains will run from the respective Platforms 2 at Bishops Lydeard and Taunton. Timetable scenarios have been developed by GWR and the optimum would be an hourly service. This would run beyond the times that the WSR normally operates and therefore, in addition to GWR, will have revenue costs for the PLC as well. Bishop Lydeard will essentially become a park-and-ride hub and we will require additional car park capacity. Trains will be operated by GWR and there will need to be technology enhancements to train to signal box communication and the token system. The line will continue to be managed by the West Somerset Railway PLC and operated to the Light Railway Order and Safety Case. Some infrastructure capital investment will be required to the line itself covering permanent way, structures and crossings.

We have just finished an informal stakeholder engagement programme involving local MPs, prospective parliamentary candidates, local councils and other major players including Butlins, National Trust and Exmoor National Park Authority. The proposal also has the support of the subnational transport body, Peninsula Transport and has been included in the recently completed Network Rail Route study Bristol to Exeter.

The economic case for reinstatement which has been modelled and put together by WSP consultants on behalf of the project indicates a positive benefit cost ratio and value for money position. The proposals are about to be presented both to the PLC and Somerset Council for approval following which the business case will be submitted to Government. The Restoring Your Railway programme itself has now effectively finished and so we are exploring, with the help of local MPs and Network Rail, alternative routes in for consideration.

Keep your fingers crossed!!

West Somerset Railway Association News

Notes from Chairman, Geoff Garfield

RESTORING THE WSRA'S STEAM LOCOMOTIVES

At the staff briefing meetings in February we confirmed that the WSRA plans to restore both 4561 and 80064 to steam on the WSR, with the work being done at Williton, as far as possible. We are now able to update everyone on the plans.

After a good deal of thought and planning, the Association and the WSR plc have jointly concluded that it would be best if the restoration of 4561 boiler was done externally, to allow Williton to complete everything else needed, and to do the complete restoration of 80064. This will allow us to have both locomotives running as soon as possible.

Trustees have already received plans and quotations from different contractors, and selected Riley & Son to do the boiler work. So, 4561's boiler, with some spare parts, will depart Williton for Lancashire very soon. We are delighted to see the way clear to have both these locos running on the WSR as soon as possible, and grateful to the WSR plc for their support and cooperation.

Jonathan Jones Pratt, chairman of the WSR plc said "We believe this is the right decision for the loco given the busy schedules ahead of us and complex repairs required to this boiler which inevitably involves a lot of time and investment as a standalone project. We can now focus on the rolling chassis as well as the standard tank which sits in the restoration queue. We hope to accelerate both timelines to achieve our locos running which will support the WSR and our future objectives for a home running fleet".



*4561 boiler awaiting restoration.
[Photo: Geoff Garfield]*

PLANNING FOR A CARRIAGE SHED AT NORTON

Also in February, we shared our intention to design and build a carriage shed on the WSRA land at Norton Fitzwarren. Since then, plans have moved forward quite quickly. We started with an initial plan produced by our design partners, the Engineering School at Southampton University, which we shared with the WSR's heads of departments at the end of January. With the benefit of their input, we asked the students to prepare an updated plan. We also thought that it would be valuable to get some direct feedback from other railways who have such a shed. So, on 20th March, the design team

visited Kidderminster, where we received a warm welcome from our friends on the Severn Valley Railway, and visited their shed, built in 2001. This produced many useful tips and ideas, which are being built into a third update.

The visit was organised by Andrew Horner, who has recently been welcomed on to the WSRA Trustee board. Andrew has used his experience as a land surveyor to produce a topographical survey of the site, which is needed to make sure the plans are accurate.

When all of this is built into the third update, our intention is to consult the planning authorities, who will have to give their approval of the final plans.

Clearly, this will be a long-term project, but we are working hard to move it forward as quickly as possible.

SUPPORTING THE VOLUNTEER CUTTING BACK GANG

We recently had a call from Steve Gooding, who told us that the volunteer gang's brushcutter is now beyond economic repair. This vital tool, together with most of the tools that Steve's gang uses, belongs to the WSRA. Trustees confirmed that we want to continue our support for the volunteer gang, so we have bought them a new brushcutter, which will hopefully give many years of service.

West Somerset Railway Heritage Trust

Notes from Steve Williams, Vice Chairman

Most people who are involved with the WSR on a regular basis will know that the Trust has now purchased the shed and trackwork at Washford from the S and DRT and our team there has begun the process of fitting out the shed and surrounding area to allow us to start our carriage restoration activities. Coach 6705 is already there and agreement has been reached with the PLC on the arrangements for moving the rest of the carriage fleet including those at Dunster West siding to Washford over the coming months.

The Trust is investing in equipment and supporting facilities to supplement that which was part of the purchase agreement with the S and DRT. John Waters and the group have installed shelving, dust extractor and an air compressor as well as making some remedial repairs to the shed. The move to Washford means that we have secured a cost-effective solution which, for the first time, delivers proper covered accommodation for the carriage restoration volunteers. We have therefore ceased our activities at Williton. The Trust has taken on a new lease from the PLC at Washford and we will be working to the PLC Safety Management System. We have also agreed with the PLC that the Trust will work to support this sustainability of the heritage and historic nature of Washford station.

In terms of carriage restoration, our primary focus is ongoing work on coach 3639 together with finishing coach 6705 ready for potential operational use and static display. In terms of 3639, wall panel frames have been manufactured and are being painted ready for installation later this year. The end wall frame has been removed and taken to the workshop from which CAD drawings will enable us to make new and wall frames.

Coach 6705 arrived at Washford on 14 February and we have purchased a vacuum pump to allow us to test a vacuum braking system on the carriage. The necessary pipework and couplings between the pump and the carriage vacuum system are being created. Additionally, water damaged internal panels have been removed and one side of the coach below the windows has been stripped back to metal ready for repainting.

Elsewhere in the Trust, work has continued on winter maintenance at Bishops Lydeard and we held a very positive pre-season briefing there on 16th March (including managing the disruption and short notice move to the meeting room caused by a planned, but not notified to the WSR, power cut that affected most of Bishops Lydeard station!) Presentations on HOPS by Steve Sagrott, Accreditation by Geoff Evens, Learning and Education by Helen Anson and the Trust Business plan by yours truly were well received.

Sadly, the situation at Blue Anchor is less positive. Ian Camp has unfortunately had to step down as Project Manager and John Anson has kindly taken over this role. Although John and the volunteer team with the support of Robin Wichard and the station staff have made really good progress on internal renovation, the external conditions in and around the building continued to give significant cause for concern. The recent heavy and prolonged rainfall has caused further damage to the external walls leading to further water seepage. The installation of the new reinterpreted museum

artefacts, displays and storyboards has had to be halted. Urgent discussions are now in hand with the PLC to determine a way forward but this means that the Museum is unlikely to be available to visitors in the short term and the planned formal ceremony to celebrate its reopening has had to be postponed for the time being.

On a more positive note and reflecting its changing and developing role on the railway, the Trust has made some good new appointments to specific roles within the charity. Sarah Hayes many will remember having worked for the PLC at Minehead, has joined as our PR and Comms Coordinator. Similarly, Chris Bolt who was the PLC Finance Director for three years and a previous Trustee of the charity has re-joined as our new Membership Secretary. At its March Board Meeting, Trustees agreed proposals from Chris which we hope will lead to an increased Membership, a better offer to Members and improved communications. Last but not at all least, we are delighted to welcome George Legg as the new Model Railway Manager. George is a long time MRG volunteer and also works on the railway itself.

Helen Anson has produced an interesting and varied new Learning and Education Programme for the new season (as well as playing a major role in creating the new stories for Blue Anchor Museum). You can expect to see work on developing the area outside the Gauge Museum (with the body of the Horse Box being moved to Washford) as well as extending the offer within the Museum itself for both young and old alike. This may well include bespoke tours of the Museum by well briefed stewards. Incidentally, this year you will see a number of Trust volunteers kitted out in a very smart gilet and our thanks go to Ian Camp for his efforts in putting this together.

One of the new initiatives that reflect our increasing engagement with community outreach will be a Guest Lecturer Programme which we will run between June and August. Lecturers and topics are already been gathered and surprisingly perhaps, not a lot of arm-twisting has been required! Included in this will be at least 2 talks to visiting societies which will be undertaken by Chris Austin. Many will know that Chris has had a long and varied career on the "big railway" and sharing his experience, knowledge and perspectives is something that we know he really enjoys.

The Model Railway Group members continue to prepare the layout for exhibiting to visitors this season. Last year we invested in additional rolling stock thanks to the efforts of Matt Jackson and we know that George Legg will be building on this for 2024. We hope to have the layout running on a few more days than in 2023.

The Trust has updated its Business Plan covering the period 2024 to 2026. This will now be reviewed by annually as many of our projects and activities span more than one financial year. We have established a Finance and Governance Group to oversee the operational running of the Trust and will be introducing portfolio-based budgets for the first time. We are grateful to Matt Sutton for his continued stewardship of the website and more developments are planned in year with the new opportunities created by the PR and membership initiatives.

We need to make a special mention also of the work of the MODES team coordinated by Peter Over and including Mike Boyce and Alan Tilley amongst others. For those who don't know MODES is a computer programme which is enabling the charity to digitise its artefacts. So far, the team have logged up to 4000 items either owned or under the stewardship of the Trust and have between 400 and 500 to go. Once completed, we will have the most comprehensive understanding of our collection in the history of the charity and this will enable us not only to rotate items for display and exhibition but also make decisions on priorities for retention and disposal. We will also be able to be much more rigorous in our assessment of the heritage importance and value of potential new artefacts being offered to the Trust.

Museum Accreditation continues to move forward through the Working Group coordinated by Geoff Evens. Things have gone really well and there is a possibility that the Trust will be ready to submit its application to the Arts Council at the end of 2024. One of the complementary activities that has run alongside accreditation has been the development of our internal arrangements for meeting Disclosure and Barring Service requirements as well as developing a new Safeguarding Policy. This work has been led by John Robinson and in March the Trust Board approved the latter for implementation.

The move to Washford has reinforced the importance of safety and compliance work and application within the range of Trust activities. A renewed focus is therefore been given to ensuring that we have the right policies and procedures and risk assessments in place to enable volunteers to operate safely and to the requirements of the SMS. Martin Brown has been coordinating this work across the various teams and is also developing a new corporate risk register for the charity.

In conclusion, this also presents a further opportunity to say a massive thank you to all our volunteers who make such incredible efforts on behalf of the Trust and the WSR as a whole. We continue to benefit from their skills, knowledge and commitment.

DEPG News

Notes from Deputy Chairman, Andy Royal

The winter months are behind us and we are now gearing up for our main event of the year, the **WSR's Summer Diesel Festival** that will take place from Thursday 6th through Saturday 8th June, with a mixed traction day on the Sunday. Our home fleet needs to be exercised and ready in time for the gala and our loco shed and yard needs to be tidy to welcome the public on all four days, so there is much to do and we are rising to the challenge!



**The WSR's
SUMMER DIESEL
FESTIVAL**

Taking place from Thursday 6th through Saturday 8th June 2024, with a visiting loco also operating on Sunday 9th.

Tickets available from the WSR website:
west-somerset-railway.co.uk

Class 35 'Hymek' D7018 will not be participating in the running because she is undergoing transmission repairs, but she will be on static display at Williton along with our two major restoration projects, D1010 'WESTERN CAMPAIGNER' and Class 14 'Teddy Bear' D9518, plus former ROF Puriton shunting loco Barclay 578 (ROF 1). All other locos will be available for use in the gala, but to avoid possible embarrassment, 'Hymek' D7017 will be undergoing three consecutive days of test running during April to ensure that she is reliable and free of the gremlins that affected her during the previous two galas.

Beyer Peacock 'Hymek' D7017 will undergo 3 days of intensive test running in April to ensure that she is reliable for the WSR's 2024 Summer Diesel Festival. Pictured at Williton while behaving properly on 8th June 2023, the first day of the 2023 event, by Natalie Royal ©



One new addition to the DEPG fleet this year is a loco that is already familiar on the WSR, the Bishops Lydeard-based Class 09 shunter D4107 (09019). An opportunity arose to acquire this loco subject to the need to carry out some maintenance and repairs during the next 12 months, and the plan is that this very useful loco will remain available to the WSR and continue to perform her familiar role. This 1961-vintage loco is in fairly urgent need of some bodywork repairs, but we will make some temporary repairs to get her through this season then plan to carry out the heavier repairs next winter.



Class 09 shunter D4107 (09019) is now part of the DEPG fleet and will continue to be based at Bishops Lydeard. The very useful loco was pictured there on 10th June 2023 by Josh Brinsford ©

Our two Class 33 'Cromptons' D6566 (33048) and D6575 (33057) are the workhorses of the line and can often be seen hauling engineering trains or providing cover for other locos that need attention, but they also need attention from time to time and D6575 has spent the winter inside our loco shed at Williton, undergoing an overhaul to her exhaust system. The opportunity was also taken to repair some bodyside corrosion damage and replace a cylinder head that was showing signs of wear, to ensure that the loco remains reliable in service. This loco should be ready to take up her duties again during the coming weeks.

Volunteer loco manager Ian supervises as Ashley and Tom pull on the torque wrench to tighten one of the eight cylinder-head bolts on Class 33 'Crompton' D6575 (33057). Pictured at Williton on 20th January 2024 by Martin Howard ©



Fund raising for the restoration of flagship Class 52 D1010 'WESTERN CAMPAIGNER' has passed the halfway mark with more than £50,000 having been raised over the last two years to fund the overhaul of both transmissions and the repairs to the bodywork. The next phase of the project is to lift the loco body from the bogies so that the suspension and braking components can be overhauled. The lifting is a major task and will involve two heavy cranes that can work together to safely lift the 60-ton body so that the bogies can be rolled out and stands put in their place. We hope to make a start on this work in May with a return to service being a realistic objective for 2025. More detail can be found on the DEPG website www.depg.org or by emailing a question to contact@depg.org



The overhaul of the second of the Voith hydraulic transmissions from D1010 'WESTERN CAMPAIGNER' has now been completed by the DEPG's 'transmission team'. Pictured at Williton on 19th March 2024 by Andy Royal ©



Photo by Andy Royal ©

The rebuilding of Class 14 'Teddy Bear' D9518 continues to make progress as the cab assembly undergoes re-fitting and re-wiring, in advance of it being mounted on the frames. The cab houses the electrical control cubicle and this was restored outside the cab and lowered back into place in February. This loco will be returning to service in the colours of the National Coal Board's Ashington Colliery and will haul its first-ever passenger train when it eventually graces the rails of the WSR, hopefully within a year or two.

The fully restored electrical control cubicle was lowered into the cab of Class 14 'Teddy Bear' D9518 at Williton on Saturday 3rd February 2024.

The DEPG has the use of one of the two Barclay 0-4-0 diesel-hydraulic shunters that are owned by the WSR, a condition of the lease being that we need to look after the locomotive and keep it in good condition. This obligation has been taken to heart by well-known WSR and DEPG volunteer Jon Tooke who has renovated the cab of the locomotive and achieved a very high standard in terms of authenticity and finish. This loco will be on display at the Summer Diesel Festival so do come along and take a look at this loco and the other items that we will have on display.



The cab of Barclay 0-4-0DH 578 (ROF No. 1) has been lovingly renovated by WSR and DEPG volunteer Jon Tooke. Pictured at Williton on 10th February 2024 by Jon Tooke ©

Keeping a fleet of diesel-hydraulic and diesel-electric locomotives, the youngest of which is 59 years old, in operating condition requires us to have a wide range of spare parts, many of which are no longer obtainable. Instead, we have to rely on scrap dealers and other owning groups who may be able to swap an item that we need for something we have that they need. Finding dry and secure space for these parts is a growing problem, so we had to bite the bullet and acquire four new (one trip) 20ft containers, two to replace corroded and leaking containers that we already had and two to provide additional storage space. The new containers were delivered with lights and power sockets installed, so all in all, a great improvement and well worth the investment.



Two of the four new (one trip) 20ft containers that have been purchased by the DEPG for the safe and dry storage of spare parts for our heritage locomotive fleet. Pictured at Williton on 9th February 2024 by Jon Tooke ©

If you can help by donating your time, then please JOIN US and come along to the depot for an introduction to what we do and how we do it. We currently have people on site from Saturday through to Tuesday and we can open on other days if we can be sure of getting at least two volunteers on site at all times, so there is plenty of scope. We have tasks of all types to suit most capabilities, both skilled and unskilled, everything from admin through to welding!

Did you know that the DEPG provides a weekly information broadcast email entitled "ROUNDUP" that is available to anyone, not just members? To join this mailing list, email ROUNDUP ADD to contact@depg.org

Reflections on the Future – HRA Spring Conference

This piece has been written by MALCOLM SMITH currently Adviser to the Board, following his attendance at the Heritage Railway Association Spring Conference. Some of the information from the presenters at the conference is contentious and should not be taken as West Somerset Railway policy! None the less there is much to think about here, and there is no doubt that keeping a heritage railway in business in the next few years is going to be quite a challenge.

Context

At the 2024 HRA Spring Conference there was a thought-provoking session entitled *90 Seconds to Midnight*. The presenters, who included a lawyer who specialises in business strategy, painted a dark future for Heritage Railways and then offered some ideas to help us escape from the doom.

Climate change

Covid and the Ukraine war have been unexpected challenges to the Heritage Railway sector as a whole and we are all still working to recover. However, we should not imagine that there will not be another unexpected event that will threaten our business model, for it is inevitable there will be – we just don't know what form it might take or how severe it could be.

Almost everyone in the HRA Conference room said they expect to be using coal in their locos in 10 years' time, the L&B and a couple of other smaller railways were the only exceptions. The prospect of no longer using coal is easier for smaller lines perhaps, but recently protesters were seen on the route of a heritage mainline steam train holding a banner saying, "Polluting for Pleasure". The question is, as the impact of climate change (man-made or not) is felt ever more forcefully, will it still be acceptable to burn coal in 2034? February 2024 was the 11th month in a row where a climate record was broken (wettest on record in the UK).

A young Chinese visitor was told that the Ironbridge Museum was the birthplace of the Industrial Revolution. They suggested it was also the crucible for global warming!

Relevance

The reaction above reminds us that our current generation never saw a steam engine in normal service and could be forgiven for wondering what we are being nostalgic about.

I visited Arlington with friends a few days ago and we walked the grounds and drank tea until it rained. Taking shelter in the house itself, I couldn't see a single thing that had changed since my visit in 2017, nothing at all. The presenters used an example of a day at Croome Court, Worcestershire in February this year when there were 500 cars in the car park, the grounds were busy, and the café was packed. But the house was empty. The National Trust exist to preserve heritage as well as being a tourist attraction, is that a model that heritage railways can operate sustainably?

Demoralised Society

Two quotes that struck a chord with me:

"There is a feeling at large that Britain as a nation has stalled. Our people feel battered by inflation, falling living standards, strikes, public service crises and a general sense of decline. Nothing in Britain works anymore. Of all the UK's problems, the loss of hope is chilling." Robert Shrimmsley, Financial Times

"What is missing is a cluster of related attributes: motivation, curiosity, confidence, and a sense of what is possible. People can't be bothered to put the effort in, don't care what they might discover, feel they couldn't dig deeper if they tried and don't have a sense of what they might achieve if they did. We have allowed too many young people to find themselves in this predicament." Tim Harford, the Undercover Economist.

Heritage Railways can offer an escape from the gloom for visitors and volunteers - if we can stimulate their interest.

The Sixty Year Rule

A great many businesses or products have a life cycle which is often found to be about 60 years. Management training speak perhaps, but the rule goes:

- Nothing lasts forever without change
- Innovations always overtake and destroy
- The unexpected always occurs

The example often quoted is Kodak because they had the technology for digital cameras before anyone else but chose to suppress it to protect their film-based products. Nokia failed to embrace the growth of smart mobile phones – avoiding change is not a good strategy. A counter example could be Lucozade who, when people stopped buying their sugary drink aimed at ill people, they reinvented it as a modern sports and fitness product.

Perfect Storm

Behaviour is changing (as it always does); Society is increasingly averse to risk; regulation is increasing; costs are increasing; passenger numbers are falling (overall). Meanwhile, we like the status quo; our equipment, by definition, is obsolete and life expired; we are losing skills; there is less inclination to volunteer; cash flow is weak; subsidies are needed; appeals for donations are commonplace; keyboard warriors are an increasing influence. It could be a perfect storm.....

Survival

The presenters went on to suggest that not every railway will survive, and it is true to say that some have already come close to closure. It is a chilling thought and there is no guarantee that donations will continue to pour in when they are needed. At the WSR, we are fortunate that the Railway is doing relatively well but there is no room for complacency.

The presenters then offered some more positive thoughts (they said!) based on the premise that, to survive, a sustainable business model is essential. It is a given that all Railways must seek the best ways to increase revenue and/or reduce costs for their business survival.

In a sustainable business, if cash leaves the business, there must be a good reason.

- Is it an investment that will pay back soon?
- a short-term crisis from which we emerge stronger?
- a strong underlying revenue stream that needs facilitation?
- Are we confident in our management to deliver it?
- Is the need for raising and spending cash clearly articulated?

If the answers to the above are not positive, then why do it? If you own and run a private railway in your garden or in your loft then you can do whatever you like to it, run when you want to and have as many locos as you like, but you pay for it all. As soon as the public come in it all changes.

Elsewhere in the conference some statistics were quoted: UK Heritage Railways have 560 miles of track; 460 restored Victorian stations; 1,000 steam locomotives; 1,000 diesel locomotives; 2,000 carriages; 4,000 wagons. Unsurprisingly, Sir Peter Henty (Chairman, Network Rail and Chairman of the HRA) says there are nowhere near that number of locos on the national network.

The question is how can all that rolling stock be sustainable on 560 miles of track when each working loco will need at least £100,000 every 10 years before a lump of coal is paid for? Can we move on rolling stock we don't need? It takes up space, is often unsightly and costs money just by being there.

Diversity

Lack of diversity is a significant problem for the heritage sector, but it is also a necessary part of, and an aid to survival.

Collaboration

This was a theme throughout the two-day event. It has value in helping to address industry challenges such as regulation, innovation etc. but, it would be far more powerful if it could be used to help widen the gap between revenue and costs.

Engagement

Demand for 'experiences' is increasing, and people will pay more if they are offered more. The increase in working from home is likely to lead to more people wanting to get out of their homes for their leisure. New streams of revenue are essential with the challenge being to create 'products' built around the trains but that are also attractive for those who are not engaged by the trains themselves.

Summary

Attributes of a sustainable Heritage Railway:

- A clear purpose.
- Delivering experiences and creating memories
- A place for achievement, creating satisfaction and well-being
- Contributing to the economy

- Embracing change and fostering innovation
- Making a surplus
- Diverse
- Having reserves

The presenter's advice was:

- If it is a hobby, you fund it
- If it is a business, there must be a future
- There is strength in diversity and collaboration
- The market always wins, listen to it
- Shed what doesn't work
- Buy in to what does work
- Move quickly
- Build a reserve

Malcolm Smith

*Manor Class locomotive 7828 Odney Manor, complete with new build tender T2061, on a successful test run at Blue Anchor on 22nd April.
[Photo: Paul Orrells]*



THE PLATFORM

The Platform is published for volunteers on the HOPS internal e-system. It is also available for all others interested in the West Somerset Railway by getting your name on our e-mail list. Sign up here: <https://www.west-somerset-railway.co.uk/sign-up-to-our-newsletter>

We look forward to having your name on our list.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND THANKS

Many thanks to all those who have contributed to this newsletter. Many are credited with their contributions but there are many others who have made available information.

GETTING INVOLVED

We always welcome new volunteers. By reading this newsletter, you will know that there are a vast number of tasks needing to be done, to keep the railway safe and operating for the enjoyment of our passengers. This does not need to be a heavy commitment, although we are always happy if you can! Contact us through volunteers@wsrail.net

FEEDBACK ON THE NEWSLETTER

Comments and/or help is always welcome. We look forward to hearing from you.

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