



# ***THE PLATFORM***

THE OFFICIAL E-NEWSLETTER OF THE WEST SOMERSET RAILWAY

No. 5 December 2020

*With all good wishes to everyone for Christmas, and for 2021*



## **From the Chairman**

We are now able – at long last - to give you some seriously good news, and the evidence is that steam trains are once again running on our railway, albeit at the moment undertaking training and test runs. We will, we very much hope, be welcoming passengers back on the railway on the Christmas trains later this month. Of course this depends on the situation with the pandemic, and safety and protection of our passengers, staff and volunteers is always going to be the first priority. But our passengers share our optimism and some of the trains are already fully booked, which is great news. We are also optimistic about next year and preparations are fully underway to bring the railway back to its position as one of the premier heritage railways. In the meantime I would like to wish you all, and your families, a Very Happy Christmas and a much better 2021!

**Jon Jones Pratt**, West Somerset Railway PLC Chairman



*Our lead picture this month is of Manor class locomotive 7822 Foxcote Manor on one of the first works trains, from Bishops Lydeard on 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2020.*

*[Photo by Don Bishop, reproduced with permission.]*

**IN THIS ISSUE.... Christmas trains...company news...civil engineering...mechanical engineering...developments in signal engineering...news from the WSRA and the WSSRT...personal track safety**

## ***Christmas Trains***

Trains have been operating from Bishops Lydeard to Williton and back over the last few weeks. These steam hauled trains have been used for crew training and refreshing, ready to welcome families later in December.

Trains are all pre-booked, through the WSR website or by phone and will run Saturdays and Sundays until 20<sup>th</sup> December, and then on Tuesday 22<sup>nd</sup>, Wednesday 23<sup>rd</sup> and Thursday 24<sup>th</sup> December. Each day there will be three round trips from Bishops Lydeard to Williton. Details of times and availability are on the website at <https://www.west-somerset-railway.co.uk/events/detail/santa-express>.

The railway will also operate trains on Tuesday 29<sup>th</sup> and Wednesday 30<sup>th</sup> December. There will be two return journeys from Bishops Lydeard to Williton at 1015 and 1245, and travel is again only available with pre-booked tickets, either on the website or by phone.

It is anticipated that trains will recommence running in late March 2021. Detailed plans are still being formulated and will depend to some extent on the Covid-19 situation. It is expected that the railway will open gradually building up to a full service in early summer.

## ***Company News in Brief...***

### ***Cultural Heritage Recovery Fund***

The Programme Board continues to meet every two weeks and receives project proposals from the PLC senior management team in line with the agreed implementation plan for the grant. If you haven't already done so, please look on HOPS for details of the progress made so far. More recently, the Programme Board has approved a raft of proposals from Mechanical Engineering together with Infrastructure projects which include Minehead Culvert and stabilisation of Williton Goods Shed roof. Decisions have also been made around proposals to re-establish apprenticeships within the PLC and to take forward important workarounds inclusivity, equality and diversity together with initiatives on well-being and mental health. Further details will be posted on HOPS and PLC Facebook as we move forward.

In total, there is a list of over 100 potential projects to be completed during this period. A summary of the most visible, larger scale projects includes:

- Repair and upkeep of up to 3 locomotives and up to 20 carriages (contribution up to an approved financial limit)
- Enabling to re-instatement of all expired competencies on the railway
- Completion of track renewal at Alcombe
- Repair of rails which ultrasonic test has highlighted as defective.
- Flailing the overgrown line side vegetation either side of track.
- Concrete sleeper replacement and fishplate oiling
- Rail replacement required at Bye Farm crossing
- Replacement of life expired drainage system at Blue Anchor
- Completion of Doniford curve renewal & drainage
- Up line track relay at Blue Anchor and replace level crossing gate
- Renewal of drivers LED lights at Dunster Sea Lane crossing
- Assessment of the extent of roof repairs required of the DEPG Williton Goods Shed
- Weed spray application - whole line to be done in early Spring

In addition to the above, there are a number of other smaller projects underway to help ensure the railway can operate in a Covid-19 compliant manner, plus several initiatives to update all our safety documentation to reflect the revised operating environment.

### ***Minehead (Seaward Way) Level Crossing***

Following informal discussions with the ORR it has been decided to include CCTV in the scheme. This will enable the signalman to see the crossing and road approaches in detail before initiating the barrier sequence. The new crossing will now be an MCB-CCTV classified crossing (manually controlled barriers with close circuit television). The first work on the ground which will take place as soon as formal approval to the detailed plans are given by

the ORR will be the installation of the concrete base for a new switch room on the Dunster side of the crossing. The room itself (a small cabin) has already been constructed off site. Regular (and frequent) planning meetings are now taking place between all the partners in the project, including Somerset County Council, who are financing the project, and the various consultants and contractors. All involved are well aware of the urgency of getting the project completed but this is a complex technical project which must be correctly planned and delivered. Inevitably, in a project like this, most of the time takes place in the preparation and the physical build time is relatively short.

### ***Williton Goods Shed and Williton Strategy Group***

Williton Goods Shed dates from the initial opening of the line to Watchet in 1862 and is of considerable historical significance. It will be well known by now that the historical problems surrounding the roof of the Goods Shed have led to further deterioration and this has now become a major safety issue. Consequently, the PLC is taking steps to stabilise the roof with scaffolding and other works as an interim measure whilst we investigate the long-term infrastructure solutions for what is a Grade 2 listed building. Responsibility for the building currently sits with DEPG but we cannot look at its future without having a clear understanding of the wider Williton site. The PLC is therefore going to reinstate the Williton Strategy Group which last met in 2017 in order to determine what needs to happen at Williton over the next 5 to 10 years. A decision on the role of the Goods Shed will be an urgent initial priority within that discussion and this will then lead to a formal fundraising project.



*Inspecting Williton goods shed roof*

### ***Washford Yard***

The PLC and the S and D Trust are progressing their discussions towards a new 10 year lease based on a pre-agreed set of Heads of Terms. The PLC will be taking over responsibility for the management of Washford station itself and there will be further internal conversations about how this will be done in preparation for reopening. More information will be made available as the discussions progress.

### ***Carriage Improvement Programme***

The PLC has put further proposals to the WSRA in terms of funding the next stage of the carriage improvement programme. We should know by the middle of December what the Association is prepared to support and then the Mechanical Engineering team will get on with this phase of the work which will take as up to the end of March 2021.

### ***News from the Civil Engineering Department***

The Permanent Way gang have been busy this month in the Woolston area removing tie bars, repairing slurried bed sites and drainage around the bridges. Much of the mechanical equipment has not taken well to the inactivity over the last six months and we have had a number of repairs to carry out on the flails and road-rail machines.

Bridge inspections are taking place over the Bishops Lydeard to Williton section. We have contracted bridge inspectors, working platforms (both road-rail and highway trucks) and traffic control to enable the inspection of all the bridges ready for re-opening the line next month.

Volunteer Andrew Horner has also offered his professional skills to help us monitor any ground movement in the area of Stones Wood, Crowcombe where we have had a number of minor slips already. The Permanent Way team set up survey stations on Sunday and engineers David Depoix and Julian Butter.

**Andrew Young, Lead Civil Engineer**



### ***News from the Mechanical Engineering Department***

Since the ME dept staff came back to work following furlough they have been busy on a number of tasks, supported by some volunteers, to ready the rolling stock for a return to public service. The first task was to reconstruct 53808 so that it could be moved to the Mid Hants Railway in one piece and in working order. Following on from 53808 work has concentrated on those tasks which have been externally funded so as not to deplete the company's cash reserves. High on the list of such tasks has been the repainting and varnishing of several of the railway's fleet of Mk1 carriages, the result of which is the very shiny set of vehicles recently dispatched to Bishops Lydeard. Prior to departure the stock again went through a full winter inspection regime. On this occasion it included sterilisation of all the water systems, this was to protect against any risk of legionella bacteria in the pipework after the vehicles had stood all summer in the hot weather.

Steam locomotives 7828 and 9351 had been hurriedly mothballed back in March just prior to lockdown, these have now undergone examinations to prepare them for service. In addition, whilst time permitted some minor faults have been investigated and corrected, these included attention to the blower ring on 9351 and a leaking injector delivery pipe on 7828.



*7828 and 9351 passing Blue Anchor en route to Bishops Lydeard with empty stock, 20<sup>th</sup> November 2020*

A contract job that brought in some welcome revenue was the repaint of the tender for 6024. This also required some work to finish off some parts of the running gear and inspection of axle box pads following standing all year.

Following Foxcote Manor's visit to the Llangollen Railway last winter it's planned spring return was delayed until the summer. Not long after that return a request came in for the locomotive to go back to Llangollen to help out with services, which it did until the Welsh lockdown. 7822 has now come back and worked a PW train from Bishops Lydeard to Minehead on 2nd November. We are now contracted to carry out a quantity of maintenance work, starting with replacing the cab floor steelwork. More to follow.

At present Odney Manor is still using its original tender which is due for replacement. Consequently, work is progressing on tender 2061T (Churchward 3500g) using volunteer labour. The frame repairs were completed some years ago, now attention is focused on the well of the water tank will be all new, together with the main tank.

Footplate crew re-certification trains are running from BL, these provide good shakedown testing for the stock along with the crews. In addition, a lot of backroom work is going on to update our systems paperwork for all of the active rolling stock and transfer it to the HOPS system.

*Andy Forster, Interim Chief Mechanical Engineer*

## ***Developments in Signal Engineering***

We are part of 'Infrastructure' and responsible for the provision and maintenance of the signalling equipment and operational telephone systems throughout the WSR (save those items forming part of museums, models etc). Some numeric idea of what we look after includes: 5 signal boxes, 6 level crossings with protective devices, 8 Ground Frames, 50 track circuits, 70+ signals, 39 mechanically worked points, 6 motor worked points, 14 Token Instruments and 23 miles of lineside cables. In providing associated electrical controls and indications we also have numerous electric lever locks, needle indicators, relays, and power supplies.

Much of the mechanical equipment is at least 60 years old, with some having seen service with the GWR. We have to balance keeping the time-honoured appearance and operation of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century 'Western' signalling systems while having to achieve modern safety and regulatory standards, and importantly affordability. A lot of equipment is not routinely manufactured any more, and special production is prohibitively expensive. This is always a big challenge for Heritage Railways, and so often behind the scenes more recent, but tried and tested technology will support a traditional device. A simple example of this is a signal indicator provided in the signalbox where the signalman does not have direct visibility of a signal arm in order that he can confirm that the signal has correctly responded to lever operation. The indicator will be as it was it was in days of yore – a Spagnoletti Induced Needle type – but whereas 75yrs ago it would have been connected between the signal and signalbox by means of a telegraph pole route and powered by a 'primary' 'Leclanché' battery needing frequent changing involving expensive and environmentally unfriendly substances, on today's WSR it is connected to the signalbox via a multicore buried cable route, and will be powered from an economical modern power supply system.

Every year we have a modest programme of minor, and sometimes major, renewals and overhauls usually undertaken during the autumn and winter months, and then during the running season the day-to-day maintenance as well as rectifying the occasional faults which occur. Given the age profile of some of our equipment it has to be given very tender care.

This year has been rather different! No site work was undertaken for nearly three months from end of March until mid-June. We slowly began to resume, firstly carrying out outstanding maintenance and tests on the equipment necessary to enable NR's Ballast Cleaner to run from Norton Fitzwarren to Allerford Jcn. At that time it was considered doubtful that there would be any public passenger operation until Spring 2021, and so our priority was to do the minimum amount of work necessary to prevent serious deterioration which could be costly and difficult to rectify. We did not wish to do more than we needed to do in the spirit of guidance to 'work at home' unless it was impractical so to do. Our activities were initially confined to checking security of equipment and for rodent damage to wiring, external lubrication to prevent seizure of mechanical components, and to maintain power supplies within tolerances to prevent possible equipment damage. We were also mindful that with no income the WSR was in no position to spend much money! On the positive side, unlike those staff primarily concerned with train operation, we only had a few months away so haven't got 'rusty' on our competencies, and no special action is necessary in that field.

As the weeks rolled on in July and August, things began to look hopeful for some limited public running during the period running up to Christmas, and so we began to maintain our equipment more fully to ensure that it

would be absolutely ready and safe to use when the need arose. This included Facing Point Lock tests and Track Circuit tests as well as other matters. We were even able to carry out some painting which always creates a 'cared for' look. There is one issue we couldn't solve – railhead rust. Track circuit operation relies on a relatively clean railhead, and whereas we carried out a lot of work last winter to renew old track circuit relays which were reaching the end of their safe life for 'younger' and safer ones under 50yrs old, they alone cannot cope with heavily rusted rails. With no trains having run for almost a year the railheads are very rusty, more so than at any time since early 1976 and will need to have a goodly number of train movements in order for track circuits to be fully relied upon. In the meantime, Signalmen will apply the standard procedures as following any period of disuse, which for us is generally early spring. Given that our trains are locomotive hauled it is likely that sufficient rail head rust will be cleared with the passage of non-public train movements specifically planned to re-familiarise train and operating staff with their duties. Time will tell!

*John Jenkins, Signal Engineer*

## **News from the West Somerset Railway Association**

*Mike Sherwood, Chairman, writes:*

So to update you all on all things WSRA at the moment...

WSRA continue to support the work to roll out the CHRf grant. We'll continue to inject funds into rolling stock refurbishment to cover off those things that the grant does not pay for.

Our plan for 2021 is to re-focus and streamline our fund-raising efforts for the railway. I'll steal a little from our soon to be published annual report to tell you that WSRA contributed an actual £140,792 in 2019 / 2020 from our rail renewal fund in support of work at Minehead, Doniford, Stogumber and Washford. Much more work is, of course needed at Washford. Therefore, we will continue our efforts on rail renewal fundraising. It's not sexy but it is essential, we need to win "the hard yards" as we say in Wales. Of course, we'll continue with fundraising for locomotives and with our preserve and protect fund which is all about rolling stock and its preservation.

Something that is currently ongoing is the setting up of proper rolling stock agreements to allow the WR plc to continue to use WSRA rolling stock.

Work on 4561 continues, and WSRA continue to fund the work on the overhaul. The blog is up and running for those who want to keep a closer eye on progress. As I think I may have already written the next job is to get the cylinders re-untied with the frame extensions which apparently entails turning them upside down (Don't ask me guv, I only fire them!). I know that Ryan will welcome back volunteers (in line with Covid rules of course) with the proven skills to assist the team.

Now that the AGM's are behind us, and hopefully all of the associated roaring and screaming, we must turn our attention again to making progress on the Bailey recommendations.

A first step in this is surely to try to heal the divisions that have emerged. This is best done, in the main, by listening, not talking. Something I know that Jon also endorses. There is no right answer to the question, we must be guided by what is best for the West Somerset Railway. Will that require some changes –yes it will and change can be very painful. We must all work to ensure the railways future, we must build a structure that protects the railway and ensures that it has a sustainable future for the next 40 years. Will that deliver personal disappointment to the ambitions of some of us – yes it will. That is why it's essential we put the long term needs of the railway first. Let's face it, most of us doing this work now might not live to see the fulfilment of the dream of a sustainable railway, we're building the foundations, it will be for other to continue the work and we must have system that put the right people in place both now and in the future. No one party acting alone can solve this issue. We need to work to build a consensus and to put the right round pegs into the round holes. Working together is the only way we will get there.



*Winter sunshine at Crowcombe, 26<sup>th</sup> November 2020: note the weed-free track!*

## ***News from the West Somerset Steam Railway Trust***

Steve Williams, Acting Chairman, writes:

The Trust is now moving forward with a number of developments in preparation for next year.

### ***Learning and Education Offer***

We have prepared and circulated a digital version of the offer to primary schools ready for the new academic year. This work is being led by Helen Anson. We have extended Helen's contract as Learning and Education Officer for a further 12 months and we look forward to being able to re-engage with local communities as Covid 19 restrictions allow.

### ***Change of Trust Name and other Corporate Matters***

We are planning to formally adopt the new name of "West Somerset Railway Heritage Trust" with effect from 1st January 2021. This gives us time to do all the logistical work involved with the change. Alongside this, we are updating our Articles following approval at the AGM. We are also undertaking a review of our policies and will be looking to align these with those of the PLC where they apply to the Trust.

### ***Gauge Museum Project***

With the end date of 28 February 2021 now approaching, the Project Group is finalising all the work that can be done given the current Covid 19 position. Some of the Project objectives in the implementation plan will have to be deferred until the railway has been reopened and we will be seeking Heritage Lottery support for this.

### ***Heritage Lottery Recovery Fund***

We are making good progress on purchasing and making use of all the items approved by the Lottery by the end of December. The big scheme to create a new exit from the south-western end of the Gauge Museum at BL has been agreed and will be undertaken during December/January including significant improvements to the rear roadway.

### ***Donations for Infrastructure Renewal***

The Trust will be making available £20,000 plus gift aid in support of the heritage renewal projects around Doniford Halt. This is in addition to the £10,000 that the Trust has already raised through its Heritage Rail Renewal appeal.

**New Trustees and we would like some more!**

A warm welcome to Mike Thompson, Helen Anson, Matt Jackson and Alan Smithers who were all formally appointed at the AGM. Due to the unfortunate need to replace Chris Austin and David Baker, the Trust is also looking to recruit two additional Trustees who, in addition to their corporate responsibilities, will hold the portfolios for safety management and heritage carriages restoration. Please keep a lookout on our website for details and we would be very interested to hear from you.

**The Staff Training Team have asked us to include the following, and we are pleased to do so. (We assume the portrait of the trainer is of either Geoff Lloyd or Rob Carter...!)**



**Has your Personal Track Safety certification expired or does it expire soon?  
Or would you like to refresh your lineside skills?  
You can now do both online. Geoff Lloyd and Rob Carter explain what to do**

Log on to HOPS in the usual way, find **Community** in the green box at the bottom of the page, click on **General Documents** and find **Personal Track Safety** in the menu that appears.

If you need to renew your PTS certification, there are three stages to the process:

1. Download the current edition of the WSR PTS Handbook: do not rely on older versions as some procedures have changed.
2. Use the link to watch the WSR online course presentation: this takes about 50 minutes but you can take it at any pace you like and go back to view again if you wish.
3. When you have completed these steps (and do not skip them) you will be ready to take the online multi-choice test: allow up to 30 minutes for the test:
  - If your PTS is due to expire in the next 30 days you should have an automatic link to the test.
  - If your PTS has already expired you will need to contact Geoff and Rob on pts@wsrail.net.

For the time being, the online method is the only way you can renew PTS, but we shall be restarting some classroom courses when circumstances permit.

If you already hold a current PTS certificate and want to refresh your skills after a long absence, then you can simply use the link to watch the online PTS course



## ***What other information is there to help keep up with the WSR?***

There is much other information available to help you keep up to date with WSR developments. If you have access to Facebook, please keep in touch with the WSR Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/WSrail/>

For railway staff (including volunteers) please make sure you keep up to date through the HOPS on-line system. Regular more detailed briefings about railway developments, including specific detailed regular briefings on COVID-19, are available to download from HOPS. Training information will be sent direct to appropriate staff, but also be made available on HOPS.

The excellent West Somerset Railway Journal, edited by Ian Coleby on behalf of the WSRA is sent free to WSRA members but is also available to purchase from Bishops Lydeard shop.

And, of course, everyone is recommended to keep a close eye on Steve Edge's "unofficial" WSR site at [www.wsr.org.uk](http://www.wsr.org.uk) There is a regular flow of all sorts of information and the best, most up to date flow of pictures you are likely to find anywhere.

### ***Please Contribute and Help Us***

Although the PLC and its support groups have been successful in obtaining a large grant from Government towards preparing to operate the railway which will make a real impact, this will only last until March 2021. There are also many things that the grant could not cover or were not eligible under the rules. We still need to address those challenges and therefore **your donation** remains a very important way in which you can contribute to the future prosperity of the WSR. The plain fact is – despite all the hard work – there won't be a West Somerset Railway for future generations if we don't weather this very difficult time and all pull together. We need your help to do this please.

The railway itself (through the Plc) needs cash to survive until then, and if you are able to contribute to this, please consider a donation direct to the Plc, or the purchase of shares in the company if you're an existing shareholder. And smaller, staged donations over the next nine months would be very welcome too.

A range of rewards are available to donors who give specific amounts of funding. Full details are given on the joint fundraising site at:

**<https://www.wsra.org.uk/fundraising>**

The Association and the Steam Trust are fundraising for heritage track components, heritage rolling stock and our historic buildings, but this has to be in line with the objects of the charity, and cannot go to the general support of the railway. If you donate through the support charities, however, they can generally reclaim gift aid on your donation.

PLC Donations: <https://www.west-somerset-railway.co.uk/donations>  
PLC Share Purchases: <https://www.west-somerset-railway.co.uk/shareholders>  
WSRA Donations: [https://www.wsra.org.uk/support\\_us/](https://www.wsra.org.uk/support_us/)  
WSSRT Donations: <http://www.wssrt.co.uk/>

### ***Photo credits***

Photos are (in order) by Don Bishop, Martin Howard, Andrew Young (2), BA Webcam, Steve Speck to all of whom we are very grateful. Tim Stanger kindly helped source the photographs.

These photographs are licenced under a [Creative Commons Licence](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

### ***Getting in Touch***

If you have any views, ideas or contributions please get in touch with the Editor, Frank Courtney, preferably by email [frank.courtney@wsrail.net](mailto:frank.courtney@wsrail.net)

### **SUBSCRIBE TO THIS NEWSLETTER**

If you want to receive future editions of this Newsletter straight to your in-box, please enter your details on the following link

<https://www.west-somerset-railway.co.uk/sign-up-to-our-newsletter>