

# A Silver Lining

Many WSR supporters have expressed disappointment that we were not successful in buying the original Dunster station sign at the delayed Great Central Railwayana auction last Saturday, 10 March. It was bought for £1,550, plus commission, by a private collector. I was privileged to be asked to lead on the attempt to acquire the sign for our Railway under the auspices of the West Somerset Steam Railway Trust, and I was humbled by the support received. Approximately a thousand pounds was pledged for the sign purchase in only 48 hours of so.



However, the cloud of not obtaining the sign has a potential silver lining. Brian Oldford, who makes casting patterns for the Severn Valley Railway and I discussed the position the day after the auction and Brian has given a remarkably reasonable quotation of only £800 to make up three casting patterns for these distinctive Brunellian signs which are a significant part of WSR, GWR and B&E history.

## A little history

These signs were erected on many original Brunel-designed stations on the original Great Western Railway, and the Bristol and Exeter Railway, the parents for both the West Somerset Railway (Taunton to Watchet 1862) and the Minehead Railway (Watchet to Minehead 1874). They are often referred to as 'running-in boards' following the later tradition of erecting large station signs at the arrival part of station platforms, so that they can be easily read by all passengers of arriving trains. However, in the 1860's and 70's, trains were much shorter, and so these station name signs were normally only provided singly, and at the middle of platforms.

The signs are all two feet high and 9 feet long, and use a distinctive 'font' or letterhead, also used on a number of other cast iron signs by the GWR and B&E (see the photographs on the next page). They are cast in one piece, as a narrow trough with a raised frame around the letters. They pre-date the later GWR style of wooden back boards with screw-on cast iron letters.

The present WSR is blessed with original Brunellian signs at Dunster (one missing, of course), Washford and Williton (both platforms there). Wooden replicas attempting to copy the style exist at Watchet, Stogumber (2) and Dunster has recently installed a plastic version of a station sign in a 1960's style between the old rail posts which held the sign which has now passed beyond the Railway's grasp.

Brian Oldford's offer is a very generous one, far less than a true commercial quotation, and could be paid for from the funds which were to be used to purchase the original signs, if those who made those pledges would feel able to stand by them for this purpose. Brian's work can be seen in the replacement Brunellian sign for Sandford and Banwell Station, also in Somerset, which serves as a

history centre for the local area. He assures me that we have all the information available from the existing signs to make up the four missing ones, which would be a tremendous leap forward in heritage terms for the Railway.

I am circulating this paper first to those WSR supporters who pledged funds for the original purchase, in the hope that they will feel able to maintain their pledge for the slightly different purpose now envisaged. They should feel free to contact me to discuss that, either by e-mail [robin215white@btinternet.com](mailto:robin215white@btinternet.com), or mobile speaking telegraph 07710 336 807.

Casting the signs themselves would cost approximately a further £500 each, and would be best done as a group. Before putting this suggestion forward I have discussed it with Ian Coleby, WSR Chairman and WSSRT Trustee, Chris Austin, WSSRT Chairman and Paul Whitehouse, WSRA Chairman. The form that further fundraising should take, would be a matter for discussion. Given that these would be very faithful replicas, it may be the WSRA would be the appropriate body to work through on this occasion.

But the first step is to get the patterns made. Please be in touch to indicate your support.

Kind regards, Robin Moira White

