

WEST SOMERSET STEAM RAILWAY TRUST

In this issue

Welcome to issue 4 of the Steam Trust newsletter. The feature article is by one of our Trustees, John Jenkins. Also included are reports on the AGM, progress with 6705 and emerging plans for Bishops Lydeard.

This edition of the newsletter uses type-faces used historically by the Big Four - Gill Sans and Times New Roman.

As before, any feedback would be welcome.

AGM: 25 April 2015

The Trust's AGM was held on 25 April.

The formal business included presenting the report and accounts, and re-election of directors. David Williams and Chris Bolt retired by rotation and offered themselves for re-election, which was confirmed by the meeting.

Following the formal business, Chris Austin updated members and other supporters present on the work of the Trust and the priorities for the year ahead. There was then an opportunity for questions and answers.

If you are not already a member of the Trust, and would like to become one so that you can participate fully at the next AGM, please see our website at www.wssrt.co.uk.

Signalling heritage and the Williton Loop project

The West Somerset Railway is currently involved in lengthening the loops at Williton. When completed, more coaches will be at the platform faces, two trains in opposite directions will be able to enter the respective loops simultaneously, and longer trains can pass. It involves renewing the pointwork at the Taunton end by placing the points back the position where the GWR placed them in the 1930s.

Currently if a train is occupying a platform, waiting perhaps to enter the token section ahead, it is not possible for the signalman to accept a second train (in the same direction) from the signalbox in rear, because the signalman must have a clear platform to do so. So if there is late running, the second



A standard GW lamp case with pyrometer in the lid and burner interior alongside, and a signalbox lamp repeater



train cannot even enter the section, which may be 6 miles long. By providing new additional Home and Starting Signals in both directions the second train is able to enter the token section and reduce delays. The facility also allows signal protection for movements between platforms for shunting irrespective of whether a train is approaching in the token section.



The Trust at the Norton Steam Fayre

The Steam Trust will again have a presence at the WSRA Steam Fayre and Vintage Vehicle Rally to be held at Norton Fitzwarren on 1 and 2 August.

The Trust's Sleeping Car, normally on display in the Gauge Museum at Bishops Lydeard, will be at the rally and open for viewing by Visitors.

A new leaflet about the history of the Fishguard boat train - which included our Sleeping Car - will also be available at the Fayre.

The Trust in miniature!

Model railway makers Hornby announced in May that they will be releasing a series of GWR Collett coaches in 2016.

Reflecting the assistance given by the railway to Hornby in developing these models, one of the 'bow ended' Brake Thirds has been numbered 5131 - the coach owned by the Trust, dating from 1928, and currently stored at Dunster.

Also still available is the Bachmann model of the Blue Anchor station building - which is the home of the Trust's Museum.

A limited number of these models are available from the Museum and from the railway's shop at Minehead complete with a numbered certificate signed by former station master and current museum curator, Pete Treharne.

The list price is £34.95, but the models are being sold for the bargain price of £25.

The scheme is also taking the opportunity to renew a lot of the electrical interlocking equipment which is reaching the end of its serviceable life. One thing that is to be renewed is the lighting arrangements for the signals. For semaphore stop signals the red and green coloured spectacles set in the arm casting would move position in front of the lampcase when the arm was lowered to allow the correct colour to be displayed at night.

Traditionally, '8 day' oil lamps were used in signals until fairly recently, even on the main line. These lamps would, provided the wicks were correctly set, not go out unless they ran out of fuel - and could withstand considerable winds. They were however labour intensive and hazardous in terms of oil storage and the necessity to climb every signal at least once a week for 'lamping', and there was some skill involved in getting the correct setting for the wicks - too tall a flame would use too much oil and a smoky flame would blacken the glass.

If the signal could not be seen by the signalman, as well as an arm repeater to indicate the arm position, a lamp repeater was also provided. The lampcase had a pyrometer ('lamp expander') in its lid, where heat from the lamp closed a contact controlling a low voltage circuit back to the repeater in the box. When the lamp went out it also rang a bell to draw the signalman's attention to it. In the last 15-20 years all the WSR lamps were converted to electric lamps - but the glass will blacken like any incandescent lamp and they eventually go out simply through cumulative filament vibration when the signal is replaced to danger.

The Williton scheme will convert all the signal lamps to Light Emitting Diode (LED) units. There are many such units on the

main line and failure/light degradation is almost unheard of, as well as power consumption being greatly reduced.



The standard LED unit completely replaces the lamp case, but does not look particularly

historic, so for signals in close public view at Williton the Trust has agreed to contribute to 'retro-fit' LED units (shown above) which will fit inside the traditional lampcase and not look out of place. When alight the LED unit will also directly operate the traditional signalbox repeater, as there is insufficient heat to operate a pyrometer.

John Jenkins

Progress on 6705 - and a visit to the SVR

Chris Austin and a number of regular volunteers recently visited the Severn Valley Railway to see both carriage restoration at Bewdley and maintenance at Kidderminster. The SVR has extensive covered accommodation for all their coaches and some excellent facilities including a huge stores for components from bogies to doors to lampshades. They work to high standards, but we learned a lot about the new materials they are using to improve the coaches for passengers, while maintaining their traditional appearance. The main purpose of the visit was to log the details of the colour schemes and finishes of their Collett BCK, the twin of our 6705. We also looked at their Toplight vehicles and the two saloon coaches (with longitudinal seating and a central table) certainly suggested a way of restoring one of ours which would prove very popular with family groups or for corporate hospitality.

The SVR made us very welcome: here SVR C&W Manager, Hugh McQuade, shows us the operating mechanism for Great Western door locks. I am not sure if we are looking shocked or thoughtful! From left to right in the picture are: Hugh McQuade, me, Ray Clack, Peter Sennett, Roger Legg, Greg McNelly and Tim Randle.



Meanwhile, back at Williton, the sliding windows on 6705 are being overhauled. At first glance, they did not require attention, but as we removed the old paint and grime we realised that some of the steel springs that holds them in the closed or open position were badly worn and brittle, and these will have to be replaced. Inevitably, some of the securing bolts also need to be replaced and will have to specially fabricated.

External painting continues and a lot of rubbing down is taking place to ensure a high quality finish. Inside the coach work continues on refitting internal panels. The missing windows will mean, sadly, that the coach cannot visit the Rally this year, but when it does appear in public, with the painting complete, it will look really good.

Chris Austin

Volunteers are welcome, either at the regular weekday sessions – Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays – or at our Sunday working parties between 10.00 and 16.00: remaining dates for 2015 are 31 August (Bank Holiday weekend), 27 September, 25 October, 29 November. We will give ourselves a break in December!

The Trust has now adopted a policy on volunteering, which can be read on the Trust's website (click on The Trust, and then Documents). New volunteers can contact Chris Austin for further details: austinca2@googlemail.com.

A vision for Bishops Lydeard?

Under the aegis of the Partnership Development Group, which brings together representatives of all the groups involved on the railway and of the county and district councils, a new Site Development Group (SDG) has been established for Bishops Lydeard to develop the blueprint for the whole site. Chris Austin represents the Trust on both PDG and the SDG.

Bishops Lydeard offers great opportunities at the busiest station on the line and its southern gateway, but currently the facilities for visitors are limited, particularly in relation to toilets and car parking. Even on gala days, the station can be relatively quiet between trains, at a time when all the attractions, including the model railways and the sleeping car are open to the public.

For the July meeting of the SDG, Chris presented a paper prepared in conjunction with the WSRA setting out proposals for a major development of the site. The objective is to broaden the appeal of the railway by offering more than a train ride, and to maintain its relevance for a new and aspiring generation of visitors who no longer have the personal reminiscences of travel by steam train. This means offering a range of attractions around the station to encourage passengers from Minehead and other intermediate stations to visit the site and spend between one and two hours there, and for visitors arriving from the south, to have time to visit the site prior to catching the train, or on their return.

The paper therefore proposed a new visitor centre on the land now owned by the PLC on the ‘down’ side of the station. This would provide the main gateway to the railway, setting the context for the train ride, and also being a resource for those that want to find out more about its history and impact. It would also be designed to encourage visits to other locations on the railway, such as Watchet, the Trust’s museum at Blue Anchor and the S&D Trust museum at Washford. There would be a new bridge to access this building, with the shop and cafe also relocated to the down side of the station, and improved car parking facilities.

The total cost of the new facilities, based on comparable examples elsewhere would be several million pounds. Such a sum could only be raised if there were a significant HLF grant, supplemented by other Trust funding and support from major individual donors or a major shareholding initiative (the Severn Valley Railway for example has raised over £2m in share sales since 2012). The aim would be to develop the facilities in stages as funding allowed. Even so, close cooperation between all the groups involved in the SDG will be essential if the vision is to be realised. Consultation on the concept will shortly be started for both railway colleagues and the local community.

Other news

Blue Anchor Museum

The work to repaint the Museum, approved by the Board in the Autumn, was completed earlier this year before the main running season started.

Further information about the work of the Trust, in particular regular updates on progress with restoration of 6705, can be found on the Trust’s website www.wssrt.co.uk.



A similar project has recently been completed on the Isle of Wight Steam Railway. The £1.2m ‘Train Story’ project was grant funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund and opened to the public in April 2014.

Train Story houses the majority of the railway’s locomotives, carriages and wagons, and has allowed it to be open to visitors daily from spring through to late autumn, providing an insight into the experience of Victorian and Edwardian railway transport.