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NO. 344

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Making its first main line appearance for the year and unaided by a diesel locomotive attached to the rear, new-build Peppercorn A1 Pacific No. 60163 *Tornado* hauls Vintage Trains' 'The Shap Mountaineer' from Carlisle to Birmingham through Kirkby Stephen on March 28. KENNY FELSTEAD

The path to Minehead's long magnificent milestone

FOLLOWING the resounding success of the Railway 200 celebrations in 2025, for which Alstom's The Greatest Gathering at Litchurch Lane has just won bronze for Festival or Event of the Year in the Peak District, Derbyshire & Derby Tourism Awards at a ceremony in Pride Park Stadium in Derby on March 18 – the latest accolade for an unprecedented action-packed year, we are now commemorating the 75th anniversary of the beginning of the world's volunteer-led heritage railway revival movement.

The Talyllyn Railway, where it all began in 1951, has arranged an unmissable series of celebrations in mid-May, as highlighted in Headline News, pages 6/7. The bedrock lesson from the Talyllyn pioneer revivalists – that is, railway preservation is the art of the possible – paved the way for the rich succession of magnificent achievements that followed in its wake, eagerly supported by a public saddened at the demise of the steam era.

Just 25 years after those first volunteer-run trains left Tywyn Wharf, solid progress had been made in the revivalist sector– to the stage where we witnessed the beginnings of what was to become, at 22¾ miles, the UK's longest standard gauge heritage line, the West Somerset Railway, with an industrial saddle tank hauling its first public train over the modest section from Minehead to Blue Anchor.

Its operational beginnings came in the mid-1970s when much of the public at large was increasingly deserting our traditional seaside resorts for Mediterranean hotspots, lured by the availability of cheap flights.

Many seaside branch lines were closed under the Beeching Axe, their high-season summer visitors considered insufficient to make them pay dividends all the year round. After the Minehead branch was closed by BR on February 5, 1971, the Minehead Railway Preservation Society organised a meeting in Taunton and a working party headed by local businessman Douglas Fear was delegated to see how it could be reopened as a privately-owned railway – leading to a new West Somerset Railway Company being formed just three months later.

Half a century on, that historic journey was recreated with the same Bagnall saddle tank brought back from its current Cumbrian home for the occasion (see Headline News, pages 8/9).

The WSR can be justifiably proud of its achievements in creating an attraction that has become a cornerstone of its locality's tourist economy, enticing modern-day visitors to explore and savour the delights of its historic towns and villages and picturesque harbours rolling country pastures in the shadow of the Quantock Hills and a fascinating coastline with a variety of beaches.

Again, the multiple benefits that the WSR has brought can be firmly laid at the door of its volunteers and their unbridled enthusiasm, and long may it continue, beginning with the Spring Steam Spectacular on May 1-4.

Further up the coast, work is underway to reopen another GWR branch that was also closed to passengers, the one to Portishead, as a main line operation.

In years to come, will we see a steady rise in the number of schemes to relink our resorts to the national network, over lines which, with current hindsight, should never have been lifted? How far and wide have the inspiration and lessons from the revivalist sector spread? We can only watch and hope.

Robin Jones Editor

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COVER: The West Somerset Railway's 50th anniversary took place on March 28/29, and welcomed back Bagnall 0-6-0ST No. 2996 *Victor* for the first time in more than 30 years. Suitably festooned for the occasion, the locomotive recreated the opening day's first train by departing Minehead exactly 50 years to the minute. For the full story, see Headline News, pages 8/9. MIKE LANNING/WSR

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75 years, one weekend: Talyllyn confirms landmark gala itinerary

By Owen Hayward

Former Corris Railway 'Tattoo' No. 4, briefly turned to face south for a few days of photographic charters, simmers at Tywyn Wharf alongside visiting Tasker B2 traction engine No. 1592 on March 8. At the May 15-17 gala, there will be much road steam at Abergynolwyn, with anniversary gala planners also hinting at a possible recreation of the Titfield Thunderbolt stand-off. NATHAN SPENCE

SERVICES from throughout its 75 years of volunteer-led operations will be recreated during its May 15-17 gala when the Talyllyn Railway celebrates its diamond jubilee – with a focus on trains that inspired the silver screen and written stories.

On May 14, 75 years to the day of the pioneering first train on the world's first railway to be run entirely by volunteers, the TR will welcome representatives from around the heritage sector to Tywyn Wharf for a day celebrating not only the Welsh 2ft 3in gauge line's own achievements, but that of the heritage railway movement as a whole.

Following a welcome ceremony, speeches and photographs, special trains will convey the guests to Abergynolwyn and Nant Gwernol for further presentations.

On May 15, the railway will turn back the clock to the first two decades of its revival. Flagship Fletcher Jennings 0-4-0WT No. 2 *Dolgoch* will be paired with the original Victorian-era coaches, just as it was on the opening day in 1951 and for many years thereafter. On that opening day, trains ran only as far as Rhydyronen, where the locomotive was run round its stock thanks to hand-shunting and a siding that was present at the time. With the latter no longer in existence, this recreation train will head to Brynglas for No. 2 to run round before returning to Tywyn Wharf.

In 1957, the BBC filmed a programme about it, which saw cameras mounted on some of the ex-Penrhyn quarry open coaches (which at the time had no roofs, although have since been heavily rebuilt to include one). Kerr Stuart 'Tattoo' 0-4-2ST No. 4 *Edward Thomas* worked the train, so its first service at the gala will include a wagon made up to look like one of the camera carriers – complete with mock television cameras. A later departure will recreate the 'Coronation Special' which ran in 1953 to celebrate the crowning of Queen Elizabeth II.

Both Nos. 2 and 4 will then double-head the final working of the day to reflect the latter's first day in service in 1952 following its arrival from the then-extinct Corris Railway the year before.

Media inspirations

Also in 1953, the Ealing comedy classic The Titfield Thunderbolt was released, the story for which was heavily influenced by the efforts of the TR preservation pioneers. The railway will celebrate this with 'The Spirit of Titfield' throughout the day – and there might even be a recreation of the famous duel from the film. A suitably themed bar will also be available on this service so visitors can travel just as Mr Valentine did in the beloved film.

The film has recently been treated to a 4K quality restoration, which will be marked by a premiere of the remastered classic either on the railway itself or at the nearby Magic Lantern cinema. Other archive films and footage will also be screened at Tywyn Wharf each day.

Meanwhile, Ruston & Hornsby 4WDM No. 5 *Midlander* will make a rare appearance on passenger services, working a small number to Brynglas to recreate the market days trains for which it was responsible for in the early days of operations.

For the Saturday, attentions turn to the 1970s and 1980s: not only does 2026 mark the diamond jubilee of the railway as a whole, but also the 50th anniversary of the opening of the extension to Nant Gwernol, which had predominantly been the domain of slate traffic and quarry worker's trains prior to preservation.

Dolgoch will reprise its role for the occasion, complete with garland and headboard, while *Midlander* will be seen with works trains used when the line to the foot of the quarries was relaid.

On the same day, Hughes Falcon 0-4-2ST No. 3 *Sir Haydn* will once again become *Sir Handel* from the Rev Wilbert Awdry's Thomas the Tank Engine stories, the author having been a volunteer guard on the line in the 1950s and basing some of his tales on events that happened on the railway during is tenure there. The locomotive was first dressed up as its fictional counterpart in 1982.

Further double-headed workings will take place throughout the day, with some trains being banked out of Tywyn Wharf to Pendre. Although this section was later relaid and the gradient eased as traffic grew in the 1970s, the steep climb through the cutting between these two stations saw locomotives often struggle on their own.

As the light begins to fade, services will continue to run through the night – the first time in 11 years that the railway has done overnight running. These will be worked by *Edward Thomas* and 0-4-2T No. 7 *Tom Rolt*, the latter featuring as part of Sunday's modern era theme.

In 1991, a former Andrew Barclay 0-4-0WT from the Irish Pete Board emerged from Pendre Works, heavily rebuilt into a locomotive capable of handling the heavy loads the

The 1953 'Coronation Special' with *Edward Thomas* is one of many trains from the 75-year heritage era being recreated at the May gala. TR COLLECTION

This year marks the 50th anniversary of the opening of the extension to Nant Gwernol, which was worked by a suitably decorated *Dolgoch*. This is one of many notable special trains incorporated into the gala timetable. TR COLLECTION

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blossoming TR was experiencing. No. 7 was named after Tom Rolt, a key driving force behind the line's preservation as well as its first general manager.

This final day will also see the two resident Baguley diesels take centre stage, pulling a train made up of some of the newest TR carriages. The most recent of which to enter service was 'Ffesdale' saloon No. 26, in 2025, built at Boston Lodge to a design closely resembling the 'Tisdale' carriages that entered service from 1969.

Continuing the screen connections theme, Fletcher Jennings 0-4-2ST No. 1 *Talyllyn* will haul a mixed set comprising two slate wagons and some of the four-wheeled carriages to portray the short train that regularly features in the Welsh S4C children's television programme Dreigiau Cadi.

First broadcast in 2023, the show was initially filmed exclusively on the TR, but recent episodes have also ventured out to lines such as the Fairbourne and Vale of Rheidol railways.

Having been predominantly used for documentaries and travelogues, it marked the first major film contract for the TR, and it is hoped that the two stars of the programme, puppets Bledd and Cef, will make in-person appearances.

In 2021, the slate landscape of Wales was awarded UNESCO world heritage status, and to celebrate the occasion the TR ran *Dolgoch* up the line with a rake of vintage wagons, another formation which will feature during the afternoon of this final day of celebrations.

Above: Ruston & Hornsby No. 5 *Midlander* approaches Rhydyronen during a photographic charter on May 14, hauling a recreation of the market day trains it regularly ran during the 1950s and 1960s. Such workings will also be included in the May anniversary celebrations. ANDREW SIMMONDS

Below: No. 2 *Dolgoch* hauls a rake of vintage wagons through Bryn Erwest towards Brynglas during a David Williams photographic charter on March 11. ANDREW SIMMONDS

Action at Abergynolwyn

Throughout all three days, the field at Abergynolwyn station will come alive with a plethora of displays. Miniature railway locomotives will be on show, while a parade of road-going steam vehicles large and small, including a one-ton steamroller, will also be strutting their stuff – and some may even venture out to other parts of the line over the course of the gala.

Further vehicles are being sought, and anyone interested in attending with one should contact lead planner Luke Ryan by emailing luke.ryan@talyllyn.co.uk or calling the main switchboard on 01654 710472.

While the road-faring machines mill about, a range of fairground-style attractions and heritage society stalls will also be available for browsing. This marks the first time in more than a decade that this field has been used in such a manner, it having once regularly hosted an annual Abergynolwyn Show of local crafts, classic cars and more.

The station's café will be open throughout Saturday night and into Sunday morning, serving hot drinks to those travelling on the all-night trains. Back at Tywyn Wharf, the station café will be open late each evening for hot food, while the Llechfan Garden Railway, in the grounds behind the volunteer hostel, will be open and running subject to volunteer availability.

However, the TR is still promising further surprises to be revealed. "This will certainly be an event not to be missed," said Luke. "We have a lot of history to celebrate, and there are still things we're waiting on the final sign-off before we can announce them with confidence. We hope as many people as possible will venture out to where it all began and join us in celebrating this significant milestone in volunteer-driven railway preservation."

Historic Possil station could be saved after being offered for sale for just £1. HUGH DOUGHERTY

Historic station for sale for £1!

GLASGOW'S C-listed semi-derelict Possil station, built by the Caledonian Railway in 1897, can now be bought for just £1 as it has been officially declared ownerless.

This move is thanks to it passing into Crown ownership under the King's and Lord Treasurer's Remembrancer scheme, meaning it could be purchased by a community group and restored for local use.

Local heritage conservationist Andy Moore, who launched a petition to save the station in August 2025, said: "More than 1000 people, both local and from further afield, signed the petition, and I thank them for their support. That has had the effect of raising the profile of the station, which is a very poor condition and is on the buildings at risk register.

"As an important piece of local railway heritage, I want to see it restored and put to productive use. Now being offered for £1 through the KLTR scheme to a community owner, the door has been opened to bids which could secure its future, rather than for it to reach the point when demolition would be the only option."

Closed in 1964, the station has lain derelict since the mid-1990s.

No *Tulyar* for GCR spring gala

THE Deltic Preservation Society has confirmed that despite its best efforts, Class 55 D9015 *Tulyar* will not be ready to debut at the Great Central Railway's April 24-26 spring diesel gala, as was initially hoped.

"While we are approaching the final stages of *Tulyar*'s 30-year restoration, we have unfortunately run out of time to complete the remaining minor tasks and finish the C exam, move the locomotive and undertake testing with coaching stock in time to run a members-only event before the gala," a statement said.

Testing is now due to commence in early May, with a potential entry into service sometime thereafter.

Following a summer members' day, *Tulyar* will appear at the GCR's autumn diesel gala on September 3-6.

West Somerset celebrates its *Victor*-ious 50th anniversary

By Robin Jones

THE West Somerset Railway began its 50th year as a heritage line with a very successful Golden Jubilee Weekend on March 28/29, recreating services that have run between Minehead and Bishops Lydeard over the past half-century.

The highlight was the departure of visiting Bagnall 0-6-0ST No. 2996 of 1951 *Victor* from Minehead at 10am on the Saturday. *Victor*, which hauled the embryonic heritage line's debut train from Minehead to Blue Anchor on March 28, 1976, returned from its current base on the Lakeside & Haverthwaite Ralway for the occasion.

Following a commemorative speech by Chris Austin, who was formerly a volunteer guard and chairman of WSR Plc and is now president of the WHR Heritage Trust, *Victor*'s anniversary special undertook a round trip to Blue Anchor to recreate history.

It was driven by Ray Lee, whose late father Harry was at the regulator of the inaugural train. The locomotive carried lamps and discs that graced its front and rear lamp brackets in the early years, kindly returned by their current owners for the occasion. The mother of WSR deputy general manager Seb Welsh recreated the festive bunting carried by *Victor* in 1976, while the Burtle Silver Band performed at Minehead.

Further privately-owned items that were returned to add to the occasion included the wooden nameplates carried by GWR 0-6-0PT No. 6412 when the locomotive, then owned by the WSR Association, starred as 'The Flockton Flyer' in the 1970s children's TV series. While No. 6412 is undergoing overhaul at the South Devon Railway, that line let its numberplates return to Minehead, where they and the nameplates were fitted to classmate No. 6435, which was on static display.

Bagnall 0-6-0ST No. 2996 *Victor* in full flight on its way to Blue Anchor on March 28. LAURA STANDERWICK

Fresh look

Also operating were GWR 4-6-0 No. 7812 *Erlestoke Manor* and WSR mogul No.9351, the latter now carrying BR lined black livery and the early BR bicycling lion crest on its tender. The repaint, carried out by young volunteers at Minehead during the winter aspect of the 50th anniversary celebrations, will feature on No. 9351 until its withdrawal for its 10-yearly overhaul. Also displayed at Minehead and later working services was Class 35 Hymek diesel-hydraulic D7017, the first locomotive to be purchased by the Diesel and Electric Preservation Group, whose Williton Depot was open to the public on both days. The DEPG has been part of the WSR family for the last half-century.

Victor worked to Bishops Lydeard at the end of the Saturday and started the next day with a short freight train to Minehead. As a nod to its original place of work at the Steel Company of Wales in Port Talbot, it headed two wagons loaded with steel rails.

The Sunday passenger timetable on was based on those used in the early 21st century.

Stations along the line were busy, with services well-loaded, and Saturday's sunshine saw good numbers of visitors enjoying refreshments in the Stogumber station garden, with the new kitchen installed during the winter being kept busy.

The Heritage Carriages project was showcased by GWR No. 6705 carrying passengers and the restored Victorian sleeping car in the Bishops Lydeard museum. Quantock Brewery, close

The line's Class 115 DMU's formation was reduced to two cars, recreating the 1980s when that was the normal make-up for multiple unit workings. As part of this historic adjustment, on March 28, *Victor* worked a late-morning four-coach train from Minehead to Williton (pictured) and back, connecting with the DMU for those continuing their journey through the Quantock Hills. LAURA STANDERWICK

Carrying BR black for the first time, West Somerset Railway mogul No. 9351, a new-build 'might have been,' was constructed as GWR large prairie No. 5193 at Swindon in 1934. Owned by WSR Plc, it was rebuilt from Barry scrapyard condition as a tender locomotive, using plans originally conceived by the GWR, and returned to steam in Minehead in 2004. ADAM ASHFORD

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Recreating the first train 50 years ago on what was to become Britain's longest standard gauge heritage line following its closure by BR is Bagnall 0-6-0ST No. 2996 *Victor,* at Blue Anchor station, on March 28. MIKE LANNING

The event saw GWR pannier No. 6435 masquerading as sister No.6412, in its 1970s TV role as 'The Flockton Flyer.' SEB WELSH/WSR

neighbours of the WSR at Bishops Lydeard, produced a special bitter to mark the anniversary, and it was on sale in buffet cars.

Live on air

The WSR also featured on BBC Radio Somerset; broadcaster Simon Parkin presented his show live from Bishops Lydeard station on the Friday, interviewing some of the line's staff and volunteers between music and other news from the county. On the Saturday, a reporter from Taunton community radio station Apple FM was on the trains, also interviewing staff, volunteers and visitors participating in the day.

The next big special event will be the May 1-4 Spring Steam Spectacular, with *Victor* in action alongside fellow visiting locomotives including LNER A4 Pacific No. 60007 *Sir Nigel Gresley*, GWR 4-6-0 No. 7802 *Bradley Manor*, 2-8-0 No. 3850 and BR Standard 4MT 2-6-4T No. 80078 alongside the home fleet.

This gala also coincides with the annual Minehead Hobby Horse traditional springtime festivity, which starts on the evening of April 30 and runs until May, apart from the Sunday.

Displayed at Minehead on March 28 and later working services was Class 35 Hymek D7017, the first locomotive to be purchased by the Diesel and Electric Preservation Group, whose Williton Depot was open to the public on both event days. The DEPG and its fleet have been part of the WSR family for the last half-century. LAURA STANDERWICK

Railways unite for Charles Beyer 160th anniversary to be marked

By Owen Hayward

EVENTS to commemorate the life of Charles Beyer, one of the founders of Beyer, Peacock & Co, who died 160 years ago this June, are being planned.

The German engineer, born in Plauen, Saxony, on May 14, 1813, visited Manchester in 1830 on a state-funded visit to report on weaving machine technology. The Liverpool & Manchester Railway had recently opened as the world's first steam-hauled, purpose-built line, and when Beyer returned to the city in 1834, he found employment with Sharp, Roberts & Co at the firm's Atlas Works where, among other engineering projects, locomotive construction also took place. Beyer served as a draughtsman for head engineer Richard Roberts who, despite being a self-taught inventor, struggled to convey his ideas on paper. Beyer's natural aptitude for drawing and design made for a perfect partnership.

Prosperous life

In 1852, Beyer was admitted to the Institution of Civil Engineers, the proposer being his work partner and seconders being no less than Robert Stephenson and Isambard Kingdom Brunel. In 1854, Beyer met Richard Peacock, and the pair set up Beyer, Peacock & Company following a £4000 loan from Henry Robertson, who became a third but sleeping partner in the firm. The company went on to build locomotives for the GWR, London Underground and Isle of Man railways and others, and also held the rights to build Herbert William Garratt's 4-8-2+2-8-4s for export.

When not in Manchester he lived at Llantysilio Hall in Llangollen, where he died on June 2, 1876, aged 63. He is buried in the grounds of Llantysilio Church, on the hall's estate, a short distance from Berwyn station on the Llangollen Railway.

Keith Whitmore, whose positions in the heritage sector include chairman of both the Bahamas Locomotive Society and Bury Transport Museum, told *Heritage Railway* that planning was underway, with several venues connected to the engineer to commemorate the anniversary of Beyer's death. "One of the aspects of his life we will be highlighting is his interesting and colourful relationship with Swedish engineer Gustav Theodor Stieler," Keith said. "There are a number of high-profile homosexual figures in railway history, but this aspect is often overlooked whenever they are spoken of."

Deep connections

Events will involve heritage lines and museums that have geographical and engineering connections with Beyer, with the first taking place on April 19 at the East Lancashire Railway. Working in partnership with the Bury LGBTQI+ Forum, 'The Rainbow Train' will run between Bury Bolton Street and Rawtenstall with a two-hour celebration packed with performance, music, and Pride energy on board. The ELR is home to Aspinall-designed 0-6-0ST No. 11459 of 1881, and Beyer's life will be incorporated to introduce his contribution to railway engineering to a new audience.

On June 2, the celebrations will head for the Llangollen Railway, where the day will begin with a service at St Collen's Church at 10am, before a steam train departs for Berwyn at 10.40am. A procession will then cross the Chain Bridge to Llantysilio Church for a continuation of the service and graveside tribute, followed by refreshments, tours, and short speeches at Llantysilio Hall.

Keith said that the Ffestiniog & Welsh Highland Railways had also committed to running a dedicated Garratt train later this year, and planning for celebrations at other venues was still ongoing.

Llangollen Railway Trust manager Dave Hennigan said: "This is a fitting tribute to Charles Beyer, bringing together his legacy, the railways he helped inspire, and the communities he remains part of. It is especially meaningful to see a steam train playing a central role in the day's events, linking past and present in the way only a heritage railway can."

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Little with large and views of a guard:
Severn Valley's gala offers a multitude of delights

By Owen Hayward

THE Severn Valley Railway's spring steam gala may have had to drop one of its billed star attractions, but the publication of the timetable and other announcements reaffirmed that the event will still be one of the year's highlights.

Although a concerted effort was made to complete the restoration of GWR large prairie No. 4150 in time for the April 16-19 gala, delays with external suppliers meant that it is now sitting this one out. One of the few Barry scrapyard locomotives yet to steam in preservation, the 1947 Swindon-built 2-6-2T arrived at the SVR from the Dean Forest Railway in 1978, although work took place intermittently until its arrival at Bridgnorth works in 2017. It is now envisaged that No. 4150 will debut this summer, with the September 17-20 autumn steam event being its first gala.

Meanwhile, the publication of the spring gala's timetable on March 26 confirmed there were still many high points for visitors. Undoubtedly a draw for many will be the former Port Talbot Railway 0-6-0ST No. 813 which, following its appearance at last September's gala, has been returned to its GWR livery, debuting in service carrying this scheme on March 28/29.

As well as double-heading some services across the four days, it will also be included in two of several triple-headed workings, partnering with visiting 0-4-0STs Lancashire & Yorkshire Railway 'Pug' No. 11243, from the East Lancashire Railway, and Bagnall No. 2572 *Judy,* from the Bodmin Railway, for a run between Bewdley and Kidderminster on the Friday morning and then Nos. 1450 and 7714 on Sunday evening for a Bewdley-Bridgnorth service.

The visiting trio will also feature in what might be one of the quirkiest combinations to be seen this year. On Sunday morning, the two 0-4-0STs will once again run from Bewdley to Kidderminster, this time with star attraction BR Standard 8 4-6-2 No. 71000 *Duke of Gloucester*, the trio offering more than sufficient power for the two-coach rake they will be hauling. This short set will be found on shuttle workings between these two stations each day, those services being operated by *Judy* and No. 11243 in top-and-tail formation.

In anticipation of the appeal of these events, the railway will have almost every operationally available carriage in service to maximise capacity, once again offering a chance to enjoy travel aboard the splendour of LNER, LMS and GWR designs alongside the more conventional BR Mk. 1 types.

Above: Bagnall 0-4-0ST No. 2572 *Judy* leads Peckett No. 2147 *Uskmouth No. 1* out of Norchard High Level on March 28 during the Dean Forest Railway's spring steam weekend. To fill the gap left by the withdrawal of planned visitors GER 'Coffee Pot' No. 229 and Kerr Stuart well tank No. 3063 *Willy* from the line-up a week before the event, resident WR 0-6-0T No. 9681 was pressed into service, with the three locomotives taking turns to double-head some workings between Lydney and Parkend. Following this, *Judy* headed to the Severn Valley for the April 16-19 gala. EDWARD DYER

Above: Severn Valley flagship GWR 4-6-0 *Hagley Hall* will work goods trains on the first day of the spring steam gala, and visitors can travel aboard the brake vans included in the formation. On the Sunday, newly repainted No. 813 will also offer another chance to sample the life of a goods guard. JOHN SHERATT/SVR

Below: GWR 0-4-2T No. 1450 and Port Talbot Railway & Docks Company 0-6-0ST No. 813, newly reliveried in GWR colours, dig in on the final climb up Eardington bank on March 28. JOHN TITLOW

A goods experience

While goods trains have also been a fixture of SVR galas, for the first time, passengers will be able to book a space to travel aboard the brake vans, offering a unique perspective of the line. Furthermore, the goods set will be entirely loose-coupled, meaning riders will get to sample a true experience of what life was like for guards on such workings before the introduction of fitted train brakes.

Goods train rides will be available on April 16 and 19 only, with GWR 4-6-0 No. 4930 *Hagley Hall* the motive power rostered for the first day and No. 813 in charge for the latter.

Wagons and brake vans are all expected to be of GWR origin, further adding to the Great Western feel of the occasion, and will present an impressive sight with the appropriately liveried locomotives.

Spaces must be booked in advance and are only open to those with valid gala tickets; places cost £15 per person per trip on the Thursday and £10 each on the Sunday.

The SVR's visitor engagement manager, Lewis Maddox, said: "This is a truly special opportunity to experience a very different aspect of railway operation.

"Travelling in a brake van as part of a goods train is about as authentic as it gets.

"You are right behind the locomotive, surrounded by the sounds, smells, and atmosphere of a working railway. It's noisy, it's dirty, and it's incredibly exciting.

"Experiences like this are rarely available, and they offer a real insight into the vital role freight trains once played on Britain's railways."

Full details of the gala, which will see up to 10 locomotives in use across the four days, can be found at svr.co.uk/specialevents/spring-steam-gala, where tickets can also be purchased for both general travel and the brake van rides.

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Bo'ness bounces back with blue debut despite vandal attack

VOLUNTEERS at the Bo'ness & Kinneil Railway pulled out the stops to keep trains running after graffiti vandals struck overnight on March 27/28, with the affected carriages returned to service in time for the Saturday afternoon's scheduled services, allowing newly repainted *Lord Roberts* to make its debut as planned.

Built in 1902 by Neilson, Reid & Co for the Coltness Iron Company, 0-6-0T No. 1 (works No. 5710) was presented to the Scottish Railway Preservation Society in 1968 by the National Coal Board. It returned to steam in 1996 and swiftly became a licensed Thomas the Tank Engine locomotive, a role it fulfilled up until 2025. With these events now being dropped from the BKR's events calendar, it was decided to return the veteran industrial locomotive to its original dark blue CIC livery.

Unveiled on March 27, it was planned that No. 1 would work its first trains in the new livery the next day, but volunteers arrived to find that carriages had been targeted by vandals overnight. The first train of the day was therefore worked by a Class 117 DMU while a team of cleaners leapt into action to rectify the damage –and were so successful that by 10.09am, it was confirmed the remaining two round trips were able to run as planned with *Lord Roberts*.

The work to repaint *Lord Roberts* took an army of volunteers giving hundreds of hours to complete the job in just three weeks. It now joins Caledonian Railway 439 class 0-4-4T No. 15189 in service on the BKR, the latter of which was itself repainted in September 2025 from BR lined black into LMS crimson lake for the first time in preservation.

***Lord Roberts* approaches Kinneil with the 12.30pm departure from Bo'ness on March 28 following a valiant effort by volunteers to clean the coaches after they were sprayed with graffiti during the night before.** RYAN EDGE

Award-winning Tanfield gets £130k grant to boost volunteers and future skills safeguards

By Robin Jones

THE Tanfield Railway has been awarded a £130,000 Reece Foundation grant to launch a three-year initiative aimed at strengthening volunteer development and expanding engineering opportunities for young people.

The investment follows the line's landmark 300th anniversary celebrations in 2025 and recent national recognition as the Heritage Railway Association's Railway of the Year at its 2026 awards ceremony in Llandudno on March 7, at which Tanfield's Ben Wilson received the Lord Faulkner Young Volunteer of the Year award, as reported last issue.

Tanfield Tracks: Pioneering People on the World's Oldest Railway will create a new people development and youth engagement manager role, leading efforts to grow the volunteer team to 300 active participants by 2027 and establish a more structured professional approach to recruitment, training, and retention.

The project will also deliver targeted engagement with 300 young people aged 10-25, developing hands-on pathways into STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) subjects through heritage engineering, restoration, and railway operations. Thirty young participants will take on dedicated volunteer roles, gaining experience designed to help overcome barriers to education and employment.

The Reece Foundation funds engineering, manufacturing and environmental initiatives in the North East to support sustainable prosperity. By promoting engineering and manufacturing, it seeks to inspire the creation of more educational and employment opportunities.

TR general manager David Watchman said: "Coming off the back of our incredible 300th anniversary in 2025 and our recent success at the HRA Awards, it is vital that we don't just look back at our history, but also firmly towards our future.

"This support from the Reece Foundation allows us to turn that anniversary momentum into a lasting legacy. People are at the centre of everything we achieve at Tanfield, and by investing in a dedicated manager to manage, mentor and engage with our volunteers and the next generation, we are ensuring that the skills required to maintain the world's oldest railway are passed around in our region, providing tangible STEM opportunities and a sense of pride in our shared industrial railway heritage".

Tanfield general manager David Watchman (left) and Reece Foundation trustee Simon Gilroy. TR

Reece Foundation trustee Simon Gilroy said: "Bringing volunteers together in this way not only sparks interest in future STEM careers, but it also helps build a passionate and skilled community that will keep the TR thriving for years to come."

Swindon hooter blast 40 years since works closed

THE man who sounded the hooter at Swindon Works for the last time returned to repeat the feat exactly 40 years later to the minute.

Hundreds of people gathered at STEAM – Museum of the Great Western Railway in Swindon on March 26 to commemorate four decades since the closure of the town's railway works.

Foundryman Ron Johnson sounded the shift finish hooter at the works for the final time on March 26, 1986, when hundreds lost their jobs as the site was closed.

At 4.30pm, a replica hooter powered by steam from a 1915 traction engine controlled by local expert heritage and steam engineer Colin Hatch boomed across the site. Former railway workers and their families joined local residents to remember the works, which opened in 1843 and transformed Swindon from a small market town with a population of 2500 into a railway town, and many spoke to the town's mayor, Coun Fay Howard, council leader Coun Jim Robbins, and cabinet member for placemaking and planning, Coun Marina Strinkovsky

Ron, now 75, said that the closure was "a really sad day," and he was privileged to sound the hooter again on its anniversary.

March 28 saw the museum open a special exhibition, The Last Blast, The Closure of Swindon Works, which tells the story of the end of Swindon's history as a railway town, and which runs until March 2027.

The Swindon Works hooter sounds again precisely 40 years to the minute since the site closed. STEAM

Class 73 for Dean Forest

EASTLEIGH1962-BUILT Class 73 E6003 (73003) *Sir Herbert Walker* has been relocated by its owning group to the Dean Forest Railway after nearly 20 years at the Swindon & Cricklade railway and will operate on the April 19 diesel passenger running day.

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Betton Grange breaks new ground on the Dorset coast

By Robin Jones

THE first-ever visit of new-build GWR 4-6-0 No. 6880 *Betton Grange* to the Swanage Railway helped make the Purbeck line's Spring Steam gala a resounding success.

The 81st Grange, which is based at the Gloucestershire Warwickshire Railway, was joined by two Austerity 0-6-0STs which were built for hauling freight trains during the Second World War. Austerity No. WD 75091, which was constructed in 1943, carries the number 68067, that of a J94 tank engine scrapped in 1971, and appeared courtesy of the Roger Hibbert Locomotive Collection and the Great Central Railway. No. WD152 *Rennes*, which dates from 1944, worked on the Longmoor Military Railway during the 1940s and 1950s, and was visiting from the Dean Forest Railway following a major engineering overhaul.

They were in action alongside home-based Southern Railway Bulleid Pacifics Nos. 34028 *Eddystone*, 34072 *257 Squadron* and 34070 *Manston*, 1920s Southern Railway U 2-6-0 No. 31806 and LSWR T3 4-4-0 No. 563, with a busy timetable of passenger and demonstration freight trains during the three days and an evening train service between Swanage and Norden on the Friday and Saturday.

Gala organising committee chairman Alexander Atkins, a volunteer steam locomotive driver, chairman of the Swanage Railway Trust and a director of the Swanage Railway Company, said: "No. 6880 *Betton Grange* is a remarkable engineering achievement and a fine steam locomotive. It was wonderful to see *Betton Grange* and the two Austerity saddle tanks, as well as the home fleet of steam locomotives dating from the 1890s to the 1940s, run along the full nine-mile length of the Swanage Railway to the River Frome within sight of Wareham.

"We were delighted to offer enthusiasts and the public such a wide variety of steam locomotives at work through the beautiful Isle of Purbeck countryside.

"I would like to thank the dedicated volunteers and staff who worked so hard to plan and stage such a complicated and successful Spring Steam Gala, which was a wonderful and evocative taste of yesteryear."

SR chief executive officer Abbie King said: "We have received some fantastic feedback from visitors about our Spring Steam Gala, and that is a reflection of the dedicated people who bring the Swanage Railway experience to life.

"What continues to inspire me most is the commitment of our staff and volunteers, because events of this scale require not only skill and professionalism but also flexibility, resilience, and a shared sense of purpose. Whether working in operations, engineering, visitor services, retail, catering or supporting roles, every individual plays a vital part in ensuring that the Swanage Railway experience we offer is authentic and welcoming.

"Our sincere thanks also go to the visiting locomotives and their crews, whose support played an important role in the success of this year's gala. Their presence added variety, authenticity, and a real sense of occasion which was greatly appreciated by both enthusiasts and visitors alike."

New-build GWR 4-6-0 No.6880 *Betton Grange* heads for Swanage on a sunny March 28 with the ruins of medieval Corfe Castle in the background. ANDREW PM WRIGHT

Triple-header: LSWR T3 4-4-0 No. 563 heads Austerities *Rennes* and No. 68067 past Corfe Castle. ANDREW PM WRIGHT

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Battle of Britain light Pacifics Nos. 34070 *Manston* and 34072 *257 Squadron* top-and-tail the 'Atlantic Coast Express' past Furzebrook on March 28.
ANDREW PM WRIGHT

***Betton Grange* passes Holme Lane with a passenger service on March 28.**
ANDREW PM WRIGHT

Austerity 0-6-0Ts Nos. WD152 *Rennes* and 68067 double-head a passenger service past Afflington. ANDREW PM WRIGHT

U 2-6-0 No. 31806 heads a freight working at Harmans Cross on March 28.
PAUL LAWRENCE

New Gresley 150th exhibition up and running in Doncaster

A MAJOR exhibition marking the marking the 150th anniversary of the birth of Sir Nigel Gresley on June 19, 1876, is running at the Danum Gallery, Library and Museum in Doncaster until May 30.

Sir Nigel Gresley: 150 Years of Innovation, Speed and Elegance, which opened on April 4, takes visitors on a journey through the life and achievements of Britain's foremost steam locomotive engineer, from his early apprenticeships at Crewe and Horwich Works, his rise through the Lancashire & Yorkshire Railway, and his pivotal roles as Locomotive engineer of the GNR and later Chief Mechanical Engineer of the LNER, designing nearly 1300 locomotives across more than 20 classes during his career.

The display features key photographs and artefacts from the Gresley Society and the Doncaster Grammar School Railway Collection and is enhanced by the Danum's permanent Rail Heritage Centre, where two Doncaster-built locomotives are centre stage: Ivatt C1 Atlantic No. 251 and Gresley V2 *Green Arrow*. Displayed alongside this pair are rare nameplates from Gresley classes A4 *Silver King*, P2 *Cock o' the North*, B17 *Doncaster Rovers* and V4 *Bantam Cock*. A new Gresley Trail created by students from the XP Schools Trust will link the temporary exhibition with these permanent displays.

Part of the exhibition will become a permanent display in the new 'Gresley Cabinet' in the Rail Heritage Centre. Society chairman Philip Benham MBE said: "This exhibition is a highlight of our 150th anniversary programme. Doncaster was central to Gresley's working life, and many of his greatest designs were designed, built and maintained here."

The society's year-long 150th anniversary celebrations are supported by the National Lottery Heritage Fund.

Waverley volunteers run low at route's highest point

A SHORTAGE of volunteers has reduced the number of open days at the Waverley Route Heritage Association's Whitrope Heritage Centre for this year.

The centre at Whitrope, just south of Whitrope Summit at 1006ft above sea level, is the highest point on the former Carlisle to Edinburgh line and houses a small museum of old Waverley Route-related artefacts and photographs and items of rolling stock owned by the association, such as two Class 142 Pacer DMUs including the operational No. 142020, plus BRE- Leyland railbus No.RB004, which run on a demonstration track to the north and south of the centre under the banner of the Border Union Railway Company. A statement said: "It is with considerable regret that due to a reduced number of available volunteers, Whitrope Heritage Centre will need to operate on a very limited ad hoc basis this year rather than offering its usual programme of open days, as previously advertised.

"We sincerely appreciate that this may come as a disappointment. If circumstances improve, we hope to be able to announce occasional open days at short notice.

"Volunteers are often present on site at weekends, and at these times we will always do our very best to welcome visitors and, where possible, offer access to the centre and railway."

Strathspey's Stateside gift 'doubled'!

A MULTI-MILLION pound boost to the Strathspey Railway from an anonymous benefactor in America is worth double what was originally thought, it has been revealed.

As reported in *Heritage Railway* issue 339, the benefactor, who lived in Washington, had a lifelong interest of railways, and has since died, visited the line several years ago and was impressed with what he saw – and subsequently gave it more than £2 million.

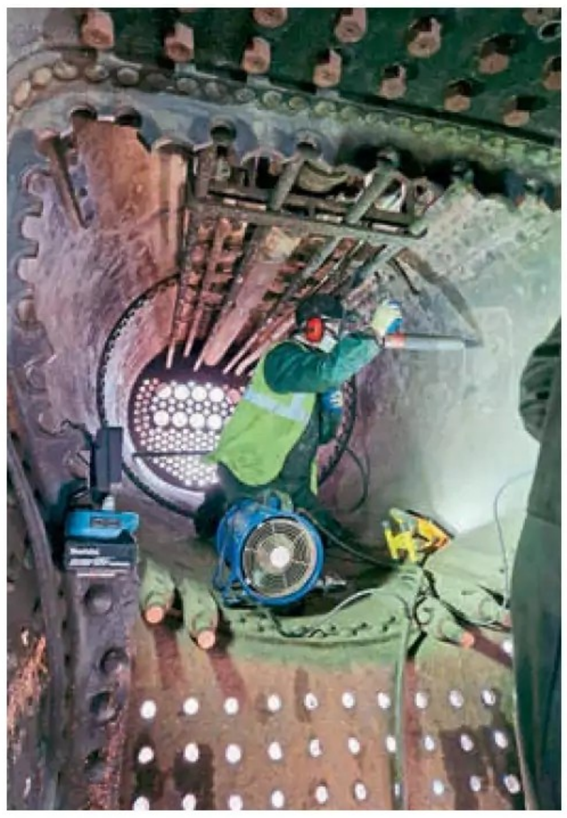
Railway officials at first thought that the gift would be liable to corporation tax, but officials were told on March 14 that this is not the case. General manager Gordon Kirk said that the gift would now be used to replenish the line's reserves, and would also help meet the cost of the overhauls of LMS 2MT 2-6-0 No.46512 *E.V Cooper, Engineer* in 2028 and LMS 5MT 4-6-0 No. 5025 in 2031.

About £300,000 is also needed to complete the running shed at Aviemore.

A setting for the hugely successful BBC TV Traitors show, 65,000 passengers rode on Strathspey Railway services in 2025, a 16% increase on the previous year. About 1000 visitors turned up for the visit of the Railway 200 Inspiration exhibition train last October, double the number anticipated by officials.

Help to get *Foxcote Manor* up and running once again!

By Robin Jones



Above: Foxcote Manor Society volunteers have turned out every Saturday, regardless of the weather! Chairman and engineer Martin Fuller is seen explaining the work to new recruit John Kennedy at Tyseley in January. ANDREW BAILEY/FMS

Right: John Kennedy needle-gunning the boiler barrel. The main steam pipe, trays and longitudinal stays can be seen above. FMS

WHILE the West Somerset Railway has celebrated its 50th anniversary since the revival of its first section as a heritage line, another half-centennial milestone was passed last year regarding a member of its locomotive fleet

It was in 1975 that WR 4-6-0 No. 7822 *Foxcote Manor* was saved from Dai Woodham's scrapyard at Barry, where it had spent a decade since its withdrawal from Shrewsbury in 1965.

First taken to Oswestry, the headquarters of the Cambrian Railway Society, and what had been its first shed allocation in 1950, it moved to the WSR in 2018 from the Llangollen Railway and became a firm favourite there.

Target set

No. 7822 last ran in 2023 before it was withdrawn again for overhaul. Its owner, the Foxcote Manor Society, aims to have in back in service on the WSR by 2028, when sister No. 7828 *Odney Manor* and WSR mogul No. 9351 are due for withdrawal.

The society is running a fundraising drive to help meet the cost of the overhaul, with the boiler to receive professional attention at Tyseley Locomotive Works and the chassis taken to Williton Works on the WSR.

Chairman and engineer Martin Fuller said: "In December last year, we achieved £100,000 of hands-on volunteer hours on the current overhaul. This is the figure we would have paid a contractor to achieve the same results dismantling the loco and boiler.

"When we relaunched No. 7822 back in 2017 with a new boiler ticket, then chairman Neil Evans proudly proclaimed the society had spent a mere £500,000 on the locomotive to date, and with only five complete years out of ticket since returning to steam in 1988. These figures are remarkably low, and Neil's pride in the society is well-earned.

"*Odney Manor* was overhauled at the WSR for £1 million, and it had already run in preservation. Similarly, the WSR Association has recently announced a projected cost of £3m to steam No. 7821 *Ditcheat Manor*! That is probably not far off the mark for a fully commercial job, given the state of inflation today, including recent rises to national insurance costs.

Paying dividends

"For the £500,000 spent on *Foxcote Manor*, not only has the society returned the engine to steam in 1988 and achieved four boiler tickets, but it has also made significant investments including retyring the driving wheels, bogie and tender (twice), and comprehensively renewing the tender. During the last ticket, we spent £150,000 on a comprehensive bottom-end overhaul and renewed selected worn-out fittings and pipework. We have also started to amass a modest stock of spare parts.

"The society has achieved a great deal for relatively low financial outlay due to the dedication of a small band of volunteers. These are not only our engineers, doing hands-on work, but also fundraising and tirelessly working behind the scenes on the numerous hidden tasks it takes to keep a charity running."

The boiler is currently in the yard at Tyseley awaiting workshop space so the smokebox can be removed and preparations made for a new copper inner firebox to be fitted.

Extensive cracking was found in the firebox tubeplate copper. The doorplate and the tubeplate have since been flanged at Buckfastleigh on the South Devon Railway. The society has now received additional donations for the copper plate, meaning that all copper for the new firebox has been privately sponsored.

Martin said: "We can certainly see the point approaching, however, there is relatively little we can do with volunteers on the new firebox until it comes time to start drilling and fitting stays.

"The plan, therefore, is to turn our attention from the boiler to the chassis, so that the chassis is complete and ready for when the boiler is done. Thereafter, it's a quick put-back-together job, with a minimum of tasks outstanding."

The society has appealed to supporters to take out a monthly subscription or make a one-off donation to buy a part, from £5 for a steel stay to £50 to drill a tube hole. More details are at www.foxcotemanorsociety.co.uk, or email membership secretary Keith Smith at 7822membership.sec@gmail.com

Fresh look for Didcot's mogul

DIDCOT Railway Centre's GWR 4300 class 2-6-0 No. 5322 has been turned out in lined GWR livery for the first time in half a century and is now carrying the style applied to the region's locomotives from 1911.

Last year, the mogul's 3500-gallon tender was repainted and paired up with 4-6-0 No. 4079 *Pendennis Castle* for the centenary celebrations of the 1925 exchange trials, allowing the locomotive to reflect how it appeared during that time.

With No. 4079 regaining its 4000-gallon type shortly after, No. 5322 looked rather forlorn in comparison to its own refurbished one, and so was taken into the workshops to be spruced up to match.

Built in 1917 and immediately sent to France to haul supply trains from the Channel ports to the Western Front, it returned to the GWR two years later and led a fairly uneventful life before later being withdrawn in 1964.

The first locomotive subject to a preservation fund to be saved from Barry scrapyard, it was the second to leave when it departed there in 1969.

Last operational in 2014, it awaits overhaul, having been withdrawn with boiler faults. It is believed to have last carried a GWR livery in 1975, having mainly worn both BR and Railway Operating Division schemes since its return to steam in 2008.

GWR mogul No. 5322 back in lined GWR livery, largely carried out by painter Harry Jones and signwriter Adam Meredith, the latter responsible for the lining and lettering. FRANK DUMBLETON

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Music stars attend opening of Ashford model centre extension

ACCOMPANIED by rock legends, Lady Judy McAlpine has officially opened an extension to the Ashford International Model Railway Education Centre.

She cut the ribbon to the 4000 sq ft converted hay barn, which is full of layouts including The Gresley Beat, Pempoul, Wouldham Town and Ravens Rock, on March 20.

The widow of *Flying Scotsman* saviour Sir Wiliam McAlpine, she was joined by pianist Jools Holland, Roger Daltrey, the lead singer of The Who, and music mogul Pete Waterman, alongside local councillors and volunteers.

Ten years after plans were first drawn up to create a model museum on the site of the former railway works site in Ashford, the dream was realised – albeit in a different location.

The original idea was scuppered by rising costs and the Covid-19 pandemic, but the enthusiast group behind it found new premises in 2021 in the village of Bethersden, just outside Ashford. Without space to display their larger model railways originally destined for AIMREC, they started with a collection of smaller exhibits, appealing to enthusiasts of all ages and backgrounds. The collection has grown in popularity each year, with more than 2000 visitors in 2025 – a 52% increase on 2024. The addition of a small shop, selling mostly donated second-hand model railway items and books, and a tearoom selling home-made sausage rolls and cakes has contributed to the popularity of the venue.

In late 2024, the opportunity arose to lease the barn, and the installation of a mezzanine floor tripled the floor area of the existing collection building. Using funds provided by the museum trustees and a UK government grant provided by Ashford Borough Council towards the cost of a lift, and a combination of local contractors and volunteer labour, the new building welcomed its first visitors on November 15 last year. It includes an exhibition telling the story of Ashford's Railway Legacy, complete with a large-scale Eurostar model.

Lady McAlpine lives at Fawley Hill, where her husband developed a mile-long standard gauge heritage railway and the Fawley Museum, which hosts a collection of memorabilia and models. She also serves as president of the National Transport Trust.

At the official opening of the extension to the Ashford International Model Railway Education Centre are (l-r) Roger Daltrey, Jools Holland, Pete Waterman and Lady Judy McAlpine. AIMREC

Pete Waterman's model railways in focus and on show

THE Museum of Making in Derby is to hold a special evening event on May 30 celebrating the 75th anniversary of its model railway – with Pete Waterman taking part in a question-and-answer session.

The layout is set in a fictional landscape but heavily inspired by Derbyshire scenery at the start of the 20th century.

Built in 1951, it sat in Derby Museum and Art Gallery before moving in 1974 to the former Derby Industrial Museum.

The event will feature a special night-time opportunity to see the model railway in action and the chance to meet some of the volunteers who have spent many thousands of hours on the model.

Return to Rheidol

Pete and his Railnuts team became part of a Guinness Book of Records feat by building Making Tracks, the world's largest portable model railway – 2279ft and 10in long – at the National Exhibition Centre near Birmingham in 2024.

The event opens at 6pm, with Pete's session running from 8pm until 8.30pm, and closes at 9pm. Advance booking is essential at www.ticketsource.com/derby-museums/t-xddaqdp

Meanwhile, Pete's 64ft OO-gauge Watford Junction layout will be displayed at the Vale of Rheidol Railway's Engine Shed Museum at Aberystwyth from July 25 until August 9, from 10am with the last admission at 4pm. Visitors will have the opportunity to take control themselves and drive the trains. Admission is £8 for adults and £5 for children, and train passengers receive free admission.

Norfolk 'Dub-Dee' looks to Scotland for its last year in service

TRUSTEES of the Midland & Great Northern Joint Railway Society have announced that its largest steam locomotive, WD 2-10-0 No. 90775 *The Royal Norfolk Regiment,* has taken on the livery of some of its Scottish classmates thanks to a subtle change of colour on its plates.

Sisters Nos. 90750-90774 were shedded at both Grangemouth and Motherwell between 1948 and 1961 and carried distinctive Scottish blue number and shedplates. This colour now adorns those fitted to No. 90775, which mirrors the colour the locomotive wore when it was first loaned to the North Norfolk Railway in 2003 by its then owner, the Essex Locomotive Society.

The locomotive is also carrying a 65F Grangemouth shed plate, which has been loaned by the Scottish Railway Preservation Society. The MGNJRS has owned No. 90775 since January 2006, and the locomotive's boiler ticket is due to expire on September 5, 2026.

WD 2-10-0 No. 90775 *The Royal Norfolk Regiment* departs Weybourne for Holt on March 28 carrying the newly-repainted plates. DAVE BALLARD

Helston Railway buys historic viaduct key to extension plan

By Robin Jones

THE Helston Railway Preservation Society has added the Cober Viaduct, also known as Lowertown Viaduct, to its land portfolio.

The six-arch curved stone structure has always been seen as a key objective and the jewel in the crown in the strategy to extend the railway as far towards Helston as possible. Often referred to as The Sleeping Beauty, there is now a real likelihood that the viaduct will be reawakened for the first time since the branch was closed in October 1964.

As reported in *Heritage Railway* issue 315, the railway launched a £350,000 Making Tracks appeal to cover the purchase of rails, ballast and infrastructure to further extend the line over the Cober Valley or Lowertown Viaduct to the proposed new station on the outskirts of Helston. Spanning the valley and river, the 373ft structure stands about 90ft above ground. Built in 1886, it was constructed using stone from a nearby quarry.

"It will be an impressive visitor attraction as passengers travel on our heritage railway, with wonderful views across the valley," said a railway statement. "It will be the Helston Railway's equivalent of the Glenfinnan Viaduct on the West Highland main line, known usually as the Harry Potter bridge'."

Work to be done

Necessary works to prepare the viaduct for future use include clearing the deck, checking the waterproof membrane and replacing it if necessary, and making the parapet and refuges safe and sound. Accordingly, public access to the bridge is therefore strictly prohibited for safety reasons.

Society chairman Tim Childs added: "We are all over the moon with delight at this acquisition. It adds further impetus to our efforts to reach Helston once more and represents the preservation of an important architectural treasure of which Cornwall can be proud. It is a major boost for the Helston Railway and every one of its hard-working volunteers, past and present.

The latest addition to the heritage sector's major infrastructure portfolio: the Cober, or Lowertown, Viaduct on the Helston branch. HR

"We are talking with other landowners to acquire more of the original trackbed, and some agreements have been reached in principle."

Elsewhere, the Helston Railway Preservation Co. Ltd. has just been granted charitable status.

New name for Crich Tramway attraction

CRICH Tramway Village was rebranded as the National Tramway Museum in time for its reopening on March 14.

The refreshed brand also reflects a wider ambition to challenge perceptions of what a museum can be, said a statement from the venue. "This is not a place to quietly walk past displays – it's a living, moving experience where history is heard, felt, and ridden," it added. "Shorter, clearer and easier to recognise, the National Tramway Museum name puts trams – and the stories they carry – firmly at the heart of the experience."

CEO Graham Bennett added: "As one of Derbyshire's most distinctive attractions, we have made the exciting decision to refresh our brand ready for the new season. The new identity reflects both our national collection and the unique experience we offer here – a working tramway where visitors can step into the past, ride historic vehicles, and explore a truly special heritage site."

Match-funding boost opportunity presented for new-build *County of Montgomery*'s wheelsets

By Robin Jones

A CHURCHWARD County Trust member has promised to match contributions pound for pound up to £15,000 to help finance the assembly of the driving wheelsets for new-build GWR 4-4-0 No. 3840 *County of Montgomery*.

The wheelsets will cost £40,000, but if the match-funding target is reached by the end of September, only a further £10,000 will be needed. The ownership of No. 3840 will also be transferred to the Didcot-based Great Western Society upon its completion.

The origins of the project date back to 2005 when the GWS signed the Three Counties Agreement with Vale of Glamorgan Council, the goal being to recreate examples of the GWR's Hawksworth County 4-6-0, and an example each of Churchward's 38XX 'County' 4-4-0, 47XX 'Night Owl' 2-8-0 and 4-4-2T County tank. The agreement saw ex-Barry scrapyard Modified Hall No. 7927 *Willington Hall* handed over to the GWS, together with large prairie No. 4115, Churchward 2-8-0 No. 2861 and 2-8-0T No. 5227.

As reported in *Heritage Railway* issue 239, the Churchward County Trust Ltd was formed in 2018 to take the GWS £1.5 million scheme to build a County 4-4-0 to the Gloucestershire Warwickshire Railway, while still remaining affiliated with the GWS.

Since then, more than half of the components required for No. 3840 have been manufactured or obtained by the trust.

Last December, the new agreement was signed which will see the completed No. 3840 based at Didcot, while also making regular visits back to the Cotswolds to work services at the G/WR.

At Tyseley Locomotive Works, sections of the running plate, the splashers and cab superstructure have now been mounted on the main frames, and one of the nameplates and a numberplate have been trial fitted accordingly.

Machining of the cylinders has been completed at CMS Cepcor, in Coalville, bringing closer the day when the front end of No. 3840 will be ready for assembly.

➜ For more information and those wishing to contribute to the match-funding wheelsets appeal, visit www.churchwardcounty.org or write to: Churchward County Trust, 4, Green End Barns, Ramsey Road, St Ives PE27 5RH.

Left: The cab number and nameplate trial-fitted at Tyseley Locomotive Works. ADRIAN KNOWLES/ CCT

Right: Bogie wheelsets and driving wheels for No. 3840 *County of Montgomery*. CCT

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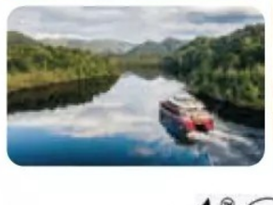

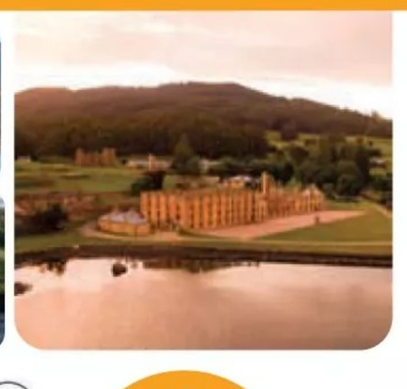

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Collection X Mallet exported following sale to Danish line

By Robin Jones

THE double Heritage Railway Association award-winning Vale of Rheidol Railway has sold one of its Collection X locomotives to a venue in Denmark.

As reported last issue, the VoRR carried off both the HRA Interpretation Award, sponsored by this magazine, and the Achievement of Year accolade, sponsored by transport firm Allelys, for the project to relocate more than 50 rare locomotives and carriages from the line's late chairman Peter Rampton's Surrey farm to new homes across Wales and beyond, while publishing Narrow Gauge Enigma, a volume which catalogues the history of the collection which, unseen by the general public, remained a source of mystery and speculation for several decades.

Among the locomotives bought by Peter on his worldwide travels was Orenstein & Koppel 700mm gauge Mallett articulated 0-4-4-0T No. 3770 of 1909, which was built at the Drewitz factory, near Berlin, to be supplied new to the Zrf Krebet Baru Sugar Mill in Java. Designed to burn wood, it likely used dried sugar cane waste which would have been in plentiful supply there.

It last ran in December 1978 and left Java in May1987 after being bought by a collector in the Croydon suburb of Melbourne.

On July 21, 2009, it was bought by the Phyllis Rampton Narrow Gauge Railway Trust, which Peter founded with his sister Ann in 1985, and was shipped via the Suez Canal to Tilbury Docks, arriving at his farm on September 25, 2009.

Because of its unusual gauge, which equates to 2ft 9½in, the VoRR decided it was unlikely to be restored to working order for use in the UK, and so it was sold to the 700mm gauge Hedelands Veteranbane in Denmark, departing in December.

The Hedelands Veteranbane, which runs through the former gravel pits of Hedeland, south of Hedehusene, for more than three miles, was built by volunteers from the Industrial Railway Club, which was founded in 1974 and is Denmark's longest narrow gauge heritage line.

Danish preservation

Its rails and equipment mainly originate from the disused beet railways on Lolland, the country's fourth largest island. Its services are operated by steam and diesel locomotives between 60 and 100 years old, once used on Denmark's narrow gauge industrial railways, and it is planned to extend the line to Tune, making it 4⅓-miles long. There are eight stops along the route where passengers can alight and explore the unique flat terrain.

The line's carriage shed houses an exhibition about Denmark's industrial railways, displayed through original carriages and locomotives. The exhibition presents the history and significance of industrial lines, and visitors can also see rolling stock awaiting restoration.

Above: Collection X Orenstein & Koppel 700mm gauge Mallett articulated 0-4-4-0T No. 3770 of 1909 being shunted by Henschel & Son 0-4-40T No. 18449 of 1921 Da7 following its arrival at the Hedelands Veteranbane. VORR

Right: *Heritage Railway* magazine editor Robin Jones (left) presents the HRA Interpretation Award 2026 to Llŷr ap Iolo, managing director of the Vale of Rheidol Railway (centre), and Stuart Williams, general manager of the Brecon Mountain Railway (which merged with the VoRR it 2023), at the awards evening in Llandudno on March 7. JACK BOSKETT/HRA

Home from home: A veteran of the Cambrian Coast Line, GWR 4-6-0 No. 7819 *Hinton Manor* is delivered by Allelys to Aberyswyth on March 12. VORR

GWR Dukedog 4-4-0 No. 9017 *Earl of Berkeley,* once a regular on the Cambrian network to Aberystwyth and Pwllheli, heads for the Severn Valley Railway. VORR

The Vale of Rheidol Railway is hosting its second Croeso Day for Mid-Wales tourism accommodation providers and attraction owners on April 14 from 10.30am to 2.30pm at its base in Aberystwyth.

Dafydd Wyn Morgan, community tourism ambassador at the railway, said: "This is a great opportunity to experience the railway first-hand, learn more about what we offer, and discuss ways we can work together to benefit businesses and their guests. Tickets are free of charge."

Guests will begin the day with complimentary refreshments and a short presentation held in the Engine Shed Museum. At noon, an optional train leaves to travel to Devil's Bridge and returns at 2.30pm. The event follows a similar Croeso Day held last autumn.

Swap completed

Meanwhile, as reported in *Heritage Railway* issue 342, the VoRR has completed the locomotive swap of GWR Dukedog 4-4-0 No. 9017 *Earl of Berkeley* for the Severn Valley Railway's GWR 4-6-0 No. 7819 *Hinton Manor*.

On March 12, the Dukedog was moved by low-loader from Aberystwyth, where it had been in static display, to the Engine House Museum and Visitor Centre at Highley, rather than returning to its Bluebell Railway home.

Hinton Manor arrived to take its place in the VoRR Engine Shed Museum at Aberystwyth, which occupies the locomotive shed built by the GWR in 1948. Both locomotives will remain at these locations for the next two years.

Operations and engineering role at Brecon Mountain Railway

THE Brecon Mountain Railway is seeking to appoint a full-time operations and engineering manager to join the team at Pant in Merthyr Tydfil.

With the Vale of Rheidol Railway set to acquire the BMR in the coming months, this role will become part of the wider VoRR group, working alongside colleagues on both lines as it enters a period of investment and development.

The role includes leading and managing the operational and engineering teams, ensuring safe and compliant railway operations, overseeing maintenance of locomotives, rolling stock and infrastructure, managing operational planning and service delivery and supporting the continued development and improvement of the railway.

The job is permanent and full-time, with a salary between £40-£50,000, depending on experience. For details, visit tinyurl.com/BMR-ops-engineering-vacancy

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Returning Deltic *Alycidon* for two heritage line visits

By Owen Hayward and Robin Jones

CLASS 55 Deltic No. 55009 *Alycidon* will appear at two major heritage line events in the next three months.

The Deltic Preservation Society locomotive is one of four guests announced for the Severn Valley Railway's Spring Diesel Festival on May 14-27, alongside Class 35 'Hymek' D7018, courtesy of the West Somerset Railway-based Diesel Electric Preservation Group. They will be joined by a Class 57 from West Coast Railways and a DB Cargo Class 67.

The SVR is also hoping that No. 55009 will make a special appearance at selected diesel footplate experiences later in the year, which can be booked at svr.co.uk

SVR managing director Gus Dunster said: "By bringing together main line performers that rarely work timetabled services here with much-loved heritage machines, we're creating a truly varied and authentic diesel spectacle."

From Valley to Valley

Later, at the Nene Valley Railway, *Alycidon* will join A1 Peppercorn Pacific No. 60163 *Tornado* for a fortnight of services that will include opportunities to take to the controls or enjoy an on-board fish-and-chips supper, in a meeting of two East Coast Main Line locomotives from different eras.

Tornado will be back on the line where in February 2025 it underwent running trials following its protracted overhaul before returning to main line service last May. Presently, *Tornado* is based at The A1 Steam Locomotive Trust's workshops at Hopetown Darlington, its most recent main line run being on March 28, which saw the A1 head for Carlisle via the Shap incline with a Vintage Trains tour. It will visit the East Lancashire Railway for the April 10-13 Legends of Steam gala, at which it will run alongside visiting Bulleid light Pacific No. 34070 *Manston*.

Running alongside the A1 at the NVR will be *Alycidon* which, maintaining the LNER tradition of naming locomotives after famous racehorses, was named after the winner of the 1949 Ascot Gold Cup. Bought from BR by the DPS in 1982, it previously visited the NVR in 2024, when one of its Napier power units was found to be defective, which subsequently took it out of main line operation. The unit was replaced during the winter months, as reported in *Heritage Railway* issue 341, and the Deltic is now fully operational once again, with the DPS still intent on seeing it back onto the main line again.

Class 55 Deltic No. 55009 *Alycidon* will appear at two heritage line events following replacement of a power unit. ALEX STOJANOVIC

Varied offering

Tornado and *Alycidon* will operate on dates between July 3 and July 14; the A1 will work public trains on July 4/5, including an evening fish-and-chips diner, with the pair then running alongside one another over the 'Best of British' weekend of July 11/12. Around these dates, they will also be operating several driver experience courses, each while pulling a rake of Mk. 1 carriages.

Unlike with other recent visiting locomotives, neither the A1 nor Deltic will feature in a wagon group photographic charter during their brief stay. However, those looking to enjoy the sight of an A1 on a goods train will no doubt head to the abovementioned ELR event where, on Friday, April 10 and Sunday, April 12, the A1 will work a full round trip of the railway pulling the 1960s-era freight rake.

For full details on the NVR's 'Best of British' event, as well as other operating and driver experience dates for the Deltic and A1, visit nvr.org.uk

Green light given for *Rocket*'s bicentenary plan to advance

A PLAN to mark the 200th anniversary of the Rainhill Trials in 2029 has been unanimously approved by St Helens Borough Council. A a programme of celebrations is being drawn up by the Rainhill 200 Committee and the Trainhill Trust.

The council unanimously voted to support the commemorations, pledging to assist where possible in securing the necessary external funding. While 2029 marks the bicentennial of the Rainhill Trials, which was won by Stephenson's *Rocket*, the year 2030 is the 200th anniversary of the Liverpool & Manchester Railway, the world's oldest inter-city line, which will also be celebrated.

Independent councillor and trust director James Tasker said: "Two hundred years ago, this borough helped change the world. In 2029 and 2030, we have a chance to remind the world of this, and to ensure that future generations understand the role our communities played in shaping the modern day.

"If we act with ambition now, we can deliver celebrations that honour our past and strengthen our future."

Artefacts from the Rainhill Trials and LMR previously housed in Rainhill Library, which closed in 2024, are currently displayed at the North West Museum of Road Transport in St Helens. The council now hopes to provide a new home for them in a permanent exhibition at Rainhill station.

The Rocket 150 celebrations in 1980, marking the 150th anniversary of the opening of the LMR, included a grand cavalcade of locomotives and rolling stock on the site of the original trials.

Cotswold steam heads trains to Cheltenham Festival race days

THREE locomotives were in steam for the Gloucestershire Warwickshire Railway's highly successful Cheltenham Festival race trains.

Headed by GWR 2-8-0s Nos. 2807 and 3850 and new-build 4-6-0 No. 6880 *Betton Grange*, the trains took racegoers from Toddington station to Cheltenham Racecourse and return for the March festival.

Cheltenham Racecourse station was first opened in time for the March 1912 festival. It was closed in 1968, reopened in 1971, and finally closed by BR, with the line, in 1976.

The first heritage-era passenger trains to Cheltenham Racecourse were for the 2003 festival; the service was hired by Racing Tours, which was later taken over by Classic Hospitality. The railway has run the service in partnership with Classic Hospitality ever since, interrupted only by the 2010-2011 embankment collapses at Gotherington and Winchcombe and the pandemic. For the event, the regular trains are strengthened to eight carriages, with two services on the March 10-12 and three on March 13, Gold Cup day.

Right: GWR 2-8-0s Nos. 2807 and 3850 heading the Cheltenham Festival race trains on March 10. IAN CROWDER

Bridge cleared just hours after Spa Valley's final train crosses

By Owen Hayward

WORK to replace a bridge on the Spa Valley Railway commenced in earnest, with the decking cleared of rails and ballast within hours of the final service to cross it on February 22.

As reported issue 341's special feature on the project, the SpVR is replacing the bridge at Broom Lane, situated between its Groombridge and Tunbridge Wells stations, the condition of which has been deteriorating for several years. The major engineering project will see the double-track bridge deck – which dates back to the 1890s and has served the LBSCR, SR and BR prior to the heritage era – replaced with a single-width span at a cost of more than £500,000.

On Sunday, February 22, Caledonian Railway 812 class No. 828 worked the final passenger service over Broom Lane Bridge, departing Tunbridge Wells at 2pm and the associated 2.35pm return from Eridge.

Following its arrival back at the former station, SpVR volunteers wasted no time in preparing the site for the upcoming removal of the old deck. By 6.30pm that evening, the rails, sleepers and old ballast had all been removed, the work having proceeded at a rate that saw a panel of track completely removed every 90 minutes.

The replacement deck has been fabricated by Beaver Bridges, and on February 10 it left the firm's workshops to be painted at a facility in Shrewsbury.

Within days, the area around Broom Lane bridge was prepared for its demolition, including the laying out of a protective surface on neighbouring land to accommodate a crane and other heavy plant equipment instrumental in the approaching work. By March 4, the main span was no more, with scaffolding erected three days later to facilitate installation of the cill beams to support the replacement; these were delivered on March 19, having come from Ayrshire.

On March 26, the moment everyone had been waiting for finally arrived. Following being painted and concreted in Shrewsbury, the completed bridge deck arrived on site and was craned into place late in the evening. Although to some, this might have looked like job done, there remained much more work to do before the railway could resume services to Groombridge and Eridge, including backfilling, installing the drainage, and relaying the track. Work was still ongoing as this issue went to press but was due to be completed by April 2.

Caledonian Railway 812 class No. 828 works one of the final services over the original Broom Lane bridge on February 22. HOWARD ALEXANDER

While all this has been taking place, the SpVR has continued to operate a limited service with a number of footplate tasters along the accessible section of line. On March 14/15, a model railway exhibition was held in the locomotive shed at Tunbridge Wells West, where an inaugural spring ales festival also took place on March 20-22. BR Class 09 No. 09004 was in operation during both weekends, offering brake van rides to the limit of operations nearby to the worksite. On March 29, a second sponsored Stride the Line event took place, allowing members of the public the opportunity to walk the route as far as the bridge, although they were unable to walk across the new deck as was initially hoped.

The line was due to reopen in its entirety on April 3, with a gala utilising the majority of available traction at the railway planned to celebrate the occasion, although details for this had not been confirmed as this issue went to press.

The railway is still appealing for donations to help cover the £400,000 bill for what has been the largest engineering project it has ever undertaken; to support the appeal, visit www.justgiving.com/campaign/spvr-broomlane

Within hours of the final train having passed through, a team of volunteers had completely cleared the 1890s decking in readiness for the bridge's replacement, which was due to be completed on April 2. SPA VALLEY RAILWAY

A bird's eye view of the worksite on March 25, showing the new concrete cill beams ready to welcome the replacement decking. BEAVER BRIDGES

Cheetal is set to return to Leeds

FOWLER 2ft gauge 0-6-0WT No. 15991 of 1923 *Cheetal* is returning home to Leeds Industrial Museums after a 12-year stay at the West Lancashire Light Railway, which had hoped to restore it to running order.

The locomotive was supplied new for the Karachi Port Trust and later used at the Upper India Sugar Mills at Khatauli in Uttar Pradesh. e Bought by Leeds City Museums, it arrived in the city in March 1985, and it needs extensive boiler work.

Left: Basking in the spring sunshine on March 21 is Chinnor & Princes Risborough annual diesel gala guest Class 37 No. 37418 *An Comunn Gàidhealach*. Built in 1965 by English Electric, this 37/4 is widely recognised among railway enthusiasts, particularly for its long association with the inspection saloon *Caroline*. Once carrying BR livery, No. 37418 was later acquired by Loram, which gave it an impressive full repaint to its now remarkable colourful livery. LUKE PEREIRA

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‘Winter slumber is over,’ announces town crier as dignitaries welcome start of Buzzrail’s 2026 season

WHILE most heritage lines seemed to jump straight into their 2026 operations without a fuss, the Leighton Buzzard Railway’s own start was headlined by a town crier who proclaimed: “God save the king, and long live the steam!”

After the usual winter break for maintenance works, the narrow gauge line’s first day of operations welcomed Leighton-Linslade town mayor David Bligh and deputy mayor James Emm to Page’s Park station to wave off the inaugural train on its journey, but not before town crier Chris Morgan addressed the more than 300 people who had gathered for the occasion.

“On this day, Sunday, the 15th of March, the fires are stoked, the water is boiling, and the whistle shall once again echo across the Bedfordshire countryside,” Chris proclaimed.

“Your orders for the day: gather your families, don your caps, and make haste to the platform! The train is about to depart! Experience the majesty of steam as it was meant to be – narrow, nimble, and noisy!

“Whether you be a railway enthusiast, a lover of history or a family seeking adventure, all are welcome here today. The gates are open and the tracks are clear.”

The first day coincided with Mothering Sunday, and travelling mums were treated to a free family photograph and a potted plant gift, while all families and visitors could explore the historic Stonehenge Works site and learn about the history of sand quarrying and transport throughout the town.

One local mum said: “We have lived here for nearly 20 years and yet this was our first visit! We had a great time, and we will definitely be back.”

On this first day, the railway was also celebrating the achievements of Esker Saward, who was passed out as a passenger train guard, and Jamie Randall who, after several years as a fireman, was promoted to be a fully qualified steam engine driver aboard locomotives such as Andrew Barclay 0-6-0Ts Nos. 1578 of 1918 *Gertrude* and 1641 of 1919 *Doll*, the locomotives rostered for the day.

Jamie started helping at the railway when he was a young boy, and has progressively worked his way to achieving his dream of driving the locomotives. The LBR’s recently formed Junior Railway Club now aims to help foster youngsters’ enthusiasm from the age of 10, giving them the chance to learn about the operation of railways and join in as far as possible until they are old enough to become full working members.

The railway’s operating season will see it open every Sunday and on

Above: Town crier Chris Morgan making ‘The Cry.’ RYAN DANIELS/LBR

bank holiday Mondays, all the way through to Halloween, with some weekdays during school holidays, a host of events for steam and diesel traction, and visits by children’s television characters. Details for these and how to volunteer can be found by visiting www.buzzrail.uk

Right: Getting up steam at the start of the day: Barclay 0-6-0Ts Nos. *Gertrude* and *Doll*. CHRIS ABBLETT/LBR

Rail replacement for lost Ruabon line to link Llangollen gala

THE Llangollen Railway will be connected to Ruabon once again on April 10-12 – albeit by vintage bus!

Keen to ensure that the railway is accessible to as many people as possible for its Branch Line Gala, a classic Bristol VR bus will shuttle between Ruabon and Llangollen during the three-day event, providing a main line connection for visitors wishing to arrive by National Rail.

The original railway was closed to passengers between Llangollen and Ruabon by BR on December 14, 1964, infamously happening several weeks ahead of schedule after the line was breached by heavy flooding that washed away more than 20 yards of embankment near Bala, along with other damage at Glyndyfrdwy and Corwen. The line towards Ruabon remained in passenger use until the planned date of January 16, 1965, with goods services continuing until April 1968. The majority of the track was lifted immediately afterwards, permanently isolating the towns and villages along the route from the national network.

For this year’s gala, the introduction of the vintage bus link mirrors the dying weeks of the route when buses were introduced to replace services following the washout up until the advertised closure date.

The free shuttle will run morning and late-afternoon services, carefully timed to link with National Rail arrivals and departures at Ruabon station, allowing visitors enjoy a full day immersed in the atmosphere of a traditional Welsh branch line.

Going all-out

The announcement was the latest in a series of developments for the gala; widely regarded as the railway’s key event of the year, it showcases the very best of its heritage operations, rolling stock and visitor experiences.

Throughout the three days, the railway will come alive with an intensive timetable of more than 50 train services. There will also be live music, vintage vehicles and a wide range of catering and attractions across stations along the Dee Valley.

Furthermore, visitors can also book exclusive footplate passes, offering a rare opportunity to travel in the cab of the railway’s resident GWR 0-6-0PT No. 7754 and 2-8-0 No. 3802 alongside the crew, experiencing the

Scenes of the mid-1960s will be recreated at the Llangollen Railway’s branch line gala when a vintage bus will connect the heritage line to the national network for the first time in years. LR

sights, sounds, and atmosphere of railway operation at close quarters, with tickets allowing for travel aboard all other services on the same day.

Event organiser Iain Ross said: “This gala is all about recreating the magic, variety and authenticity of a classic rural branch line.

“The addition of the Ruabon rail replacement shuttle strengthens that vision by making it easier for people to connect directly from the national network and become part of the experience from the moment they arrive.

“We are delighted by the strong interest shown so far in our footplate passes, which provide an unforgettable perspective on heritage railway operation.

“With a superb mix of visiting locomotives and our own home fleet, this is shaping up to be our most ambitious gala yet and a true celebration of everything that makes this railway special.”

New double bid to keep P2 progress on track

By Robin Jones

TWO clubs have been established to finance the construction of essential components for the new £6 million Gresley P2 2-8-2 No. 2007 *Prince of Wales*.

Since 2013, The A1 Steam Locomotive Trust's supporters have financed nearly £1 million of components. At Darlington Locomotive Works, the team building the new Mikado is preparing to fit the three-cylinder monobloc within the frames. With the purchase of a mobile A-frame crane of 15-ton capacity, in collaboration with Colin Green, from Riley & Sons, this milestone will mark the next step towards mounting the boiler and creating Britain's most powerful new steam locomotive.

With the final stages of construction now coming into view funds need to be raised for the remaining systems and fittings to complete the P2 by 2029.

The first of the new supporters' clubs is the Raising Steam Club, to which all donations will finance the steaming of the new boiler. As reported in *Heritage Railway* issue 341, the P2 project passed a landmark with the delivery of the boiler from DB Dampflokwerk Meiningen, where it successfully passed its hydraulic test and received its CE mark.

However, before the boiler can be steam-tested and fully certified, several essential components still need to be fitted, including the fire grate, safety valves, backhead cocks and gauges. Funding will also be needed for the final steam test and certification.

During the next year, the trust aims to raise £50,000 by inviting 100 supporters to contribute £500 each. All funds will be ringfenced for completing the boiler, including the many specialist valves, gauges and fittings required before steaming. The largest single item is a complete fire grate with rocking mechanism and carrier bars, costing about £25,000.

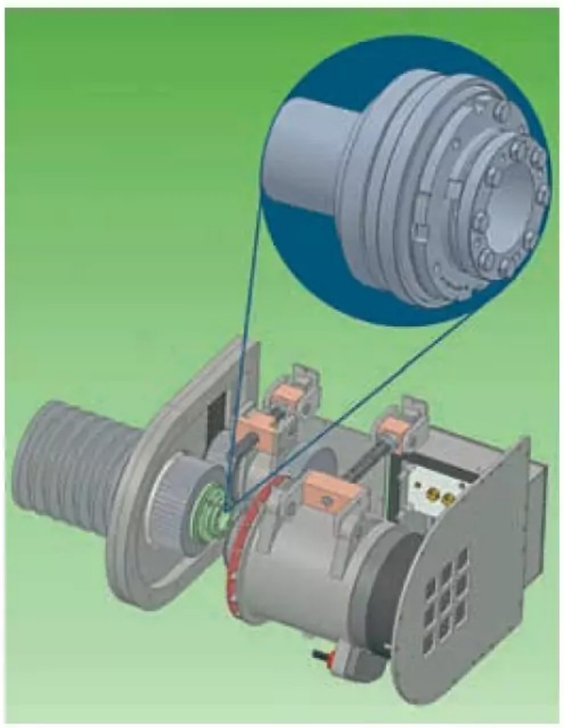
To join this club, visit www.a1steam.com/raisingsteam#/

Rolling onward

The second new supporters' club aims to fund the P2's Axle Driven Alternator (ADA) clutch trial and design project. Despite the design of the locomotive being inspired by the 1930s one, the new P2 will incorporate about six miles of modern electrical cabling. When running, these systems are powered by steam turbogenerators and an ADA mounted beneath the tender.

An all-new ADA is required for the P2. Although a spare alternator existed, it dated from the 1960s and would have needed costly refurbishment, while offering poor maintainability and outdated control equipment. Developing a modern design will deliver greater reliability, easier maintenance and improved performance, said a company statement.

Two prototype alternators have already been designed and trialled using A1 Pacifici No. 60163 *Tornado* as a test platform. The latest version has been operating for the past year in an in-service trial with independent certification body Ricardo. Testing has revealed that shock loads which result if the tender axle momentarily locks can damage the drive belts. The solution is to introduce a clutch into the alternator drive, allowing excess energy to dissipate safely.



The design for the new Axle Driver Alternative for P2 2-8-2 No. 2007 *Prince of Wales*. A1SLT

To complete the design, install the clutch and finish testing before the trial deadline, the trust is seeking £15,000.

Through the ADA Design Club, just 15 supporters donating £1000 each can help deliver a fully-certified alternator system for the P2: for more details, visit www.a1steam.com/p2ada#/

➜ Darlington Locomotive Works has a new series of open days on the first full weekend of every month, from 10am to 3pm. Saturdays are family fun days, while on Sundays, the focus is on heritage and engineering. For free tickets, book at https://tickets.hopetowndarlington.co.uk

Western Region moves east with HST trips on Mid-Norfolk

THE Mid-Norfolk Railway ran public trips on a Class 125 High Speed Train recently withdrawn from Great Western Railway service.

The Castle set including power cars Nos. 43092 and 43093 arrived at Dereham following its departure from Laira depot at Plymouth and the last set to leave the South West following the withdrawal of the class from main line service in the region.

The HST set was in use since its introduction on the Western Region in the late 1970s but in recent years had been cut down following the end of the type's use between Penzance and Paddington. What became known as the GWR Castle sets were then used in their shortened form for secondary main line services. The ROMIC Group, which has a base in Dereham yard, bought the set from First Group (First Rail Holdings Limited), the parent company of Great Western Railway.

The GWR Class 125 High Speed Train Castle set crosses Crownthorpe Bridge, near Wymondham, on March 22. MNR

Class 125 High Speed Train Castle set and Class 142 Pacer DMU No. 142061 in public service at Thuxton. MNR

On March 22, both the HST – returned to a four-plus-two set for the day – and home-based Class 142 Pacer DMU No. 142061 ran services. The HST worked the first departure from Dereham at 9.30am, making four round trips and the Pacer three.

The last HST trip was one way to Wymondham and then returned empty to Dereham to allow those who started at Wymondham to finish their day there.

The MNR offered a refreshment service using an on-train trolley, as was once familiar to users of HSTs on the main line.

ROMIC Group marketing and hire manager Simon Lowe the said: "We are delighted to offer another special HST running day to the MNR following the success of our running day last year. The HST used last year (No. 43094/43122) is now back running on the main line, and we are really pleased to have been able to acquire one of the last GWR Castle sets.

"We hope to see it in use for many more years to come, either in the UK or abroad."

The company has been buying and then exporting HSTs for further use in Nigeria and Mexico, but also operates a set for hire in the UK.

MNR general manager Samantha Taylor said: "We are extremely grateful to ROMIC to give us this special opportunity to share with our visitors the experience of travelling on these iconic trains. The HSTs were such an important part of British railway history."

The other two cars which arrived with the HST from Laira have already been sold.

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Left: New Art Deco: The Golden Age of Poster Design. LTM

Right: London Transport Museum's 2026 young musicians. LTM

Brand refresh helps break 45-year record for London Transport Museum's visitor count

By Robin Jones

A NEW record was set by London Transport Museum which welcomed 449,599 visitors in 2025, its highest annual total since the Covent Garden venue opened in 1980, and an increase of 6% on the previous year.

The rise came in the wake of the launch of the museum's refreshed brand identity and the opening of two new exhibitions exploring London's transport heritage, an increased focus on groups and travel trade engagement, and the introduction of Friday afternoon musical performances by up-and-coming classical and jazz musicians.

The venue's Hidden London guided tours (see News, page 40) were launched a decade before an all-time high of 48,630 ticketholders in 2025. For the first time, the tours were also opened to visitors aged 10-16.

The new brand identity launched in July 2024 under the leadership of LTM director and CEO Elizabeth McKay includes a striking new spectrum 'museum' roundel which reimagines Edward Johnston's 100-year-old iconic 'bullseye' design. This updated look celebrates London's creativity and the capital's rich transport design heritage, from pioneering engineering to world-famous poster art. Furthermore, a new audience-focused publicity campaign developed by the museum's marketing and public relations and design teams has boosted visibility and reached new visitors around the capital and beyond.

Welcome growth

The attendance figure was announced by the Association of Leading Visitor Attractions on March 20. ALVA director Bernard Donoghue OBE said: "LMS's 6% growth in visitor numbers between 2024 and 2025 is much higher than the national average and really shows what creative programming, inspiring design, and providing spaces and moments for joy and fun can do. It's a great success story."

Elizabeth said: "Since opening on the Covent Garden Piazza in 1980, LTM has welcomed more than 10 million visitors. We are delighted that each year, more and more people are excited to discover the story of London and how life here has been shaped by its ever-evolving transport network. Ahead of our 50th anniversary in 2030, we are thinking creatively about what the future will look like for LTM, so watch this space."

The Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, added: 'This success is a reminder of how important our cultural institutions are in connecting people with London's unique story, and there's lots more to come as we continue to build a better London for everyone.'

A newly-opened exhibition, Art Deco: The Golden Age of Poster Design, in the museum's Global Poster Gallery features more than 100 objects exploring how the Art Deco movement has influenced London's visual identity, from poster art to station architecture and train design.

The current display in the photographic gallery features images of the capital and its evolving transport network, contrasting ones from the museum's historic archive with contemporary photographs by Transport for London train driver Anne Maningas.

For the second year running, visitors can also enjoy music in the museum. A new line-up of rising stars from three of London's conservatoires will be performing on term-time Fridays at 2pm. Exhibitions and Friday afternoon performances are included with adult entry tickets, which also offer unlimited free return daytime entry for a year.

Helen joins the top team at museum

HELEN Campbell has joined London Transport Museum's senior leadership team as its new chief financial officer.

She has more than 30 years of experience in the commercial, charity and cultural sectors, previously held roles with Thomson Reuters and Save the Children International, and most recently was chief financial officer at the English National Opera.

Helen said: "As a child, I loved visiting the museum's collection when it was housed at Syon Park and have fond memories of bringing my own children to visit the museum in Covent Garden and depot open days in Acton. To now be part of the team shaping the future of LTM and its ambitious plans is extremely exciting."

Museum director and CEO Elizabeth McKay said: "Helen's extensive expertise in managing complex financial initiatives and her passion for engaging audiences with culture, history and heritage will help guide LTM's exciting journey towards celebrating our 50th birthday in 2030."

Helen Campbell. LTM

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Oil-fired *Omaha* emerges for testing at Grosmont

CONVERSION to oil firing on USATC S160 2-8-0 No. 2253 *Omaha* has been all but completed at the North Yorkshire Moors Railway, with the locomotive imminently due to commence testing as this issue went to press. Furthermore, the locomotive will be fuelled using British rapeseed oil from Lincolnshire, meaning it will run using a sustainable source from regional farms.

The lengthy conversion began in 2024 when the NYMR announced the project in partnership with *Omaha*'s owner, Pete Best, and American engineering firm FMW Solutions, the intention being to retain a locomotive that can run during periods of high fire risk with coal-burning locomotives. Alterations to the cab layout have also made this more ergonomically friendly for crews.

In addition to making huge savings on coal, it also reduces crew working hours by up to two hours, with less time needed to prepare and dispose of the locomotive at the start and end of the day. No date for its entry into service has yet been confirmed.

Right: S160 No. 2253 *Omaha* in the running shed at Grosmont on March 26 prior to testing commencing. PAUL WICKHAM/NYMR

Biggest-ever 1940s weekend at KESR

By Geoff Courtney

VOLUNTEERS and staff at the Kent & East Sussex Railway are gearing themselves up for their biggest and most ambitious 1940s weekend ever on May 16/17. The return to wartime Britain is one of the most popular annual events held by the Tenterden-based railway, and the early signs are that this year's will trump even last year's gala, which attracted more than 1800 visitors.

The nostalgia will be in full flow at the line's Tenterden Town and Bodiam stations, with trains running every 45 minutes throughout both days, from the first service leaving Tenterden at 10.45am to the last departing from Bodiam at 5.03pm.

Attractions at Tenterden will include a full-scale replica Battle of Britain Spitfire, displays of Land Army and period civilian and military vehicles, wartime tunes sung by a local trio and played by a DJ, performances from the D-Day Darlings, vintage clothing, accessories, books and toys stalls, a 1940s makeover parlour, and Viv the Spiv with his black market goods.

Ten miles up the line at Bodiam station, a NAAFI refreshments van will be joined a Royal Navy commando and Desert Rats encampment accompanied by a vintage vehicle display, live performances, a 1940s corner shop, and trade stalls.

Freedom tickets will offer unlimited travel, and platform tickets will also be available for visitors who wish to view either or both stations. Trains are due to be hauled by Austerities Nos. 2857 *Swiftsure* and 68032, plus Hunslet 0-6-0ST No. 15 *Hastings*.

Memories: A reenactor is deep in thought as he views A1X 'Terrier' 0-6-0T No. 2678 *Knowle* (BR No. 32678) at the KESR station of Tenterden Town during a previous 1940s weekend. ROBIN COOMBES

The all-female footplate crew of 160-year-old No. 2 *Dolgoch*, which headed the Talyllyn Railway's International Women's Day special on March 9. TR

International Women's Day success at Talyllyn Railway

IN its 75th anniversary year, the Talyllyn Railway successfully celebrated International Women's Day on Sunday, March 8, when a special train crewed entirely by women ran from Tywyn Wharf to Abergynolwyn. Tickets were free to women in the local community.

The train, hauled by Fletcher Jennings 0-4-0-WT No. 2 *Dolgoch*, was completely filled, with every available seat being taken. The all-day event also featured demonstrations of their skillsets by the line's female volunteers, from hedge laying to signwriting.

One of the main objectives of the day was to highlight the importance of inclusion and the railway's commitment to supporting women in achieving their potential.

May railway festival set for Melton Constable

THE headquarters village of the Midland & Great Northern Joint Railway will hold a special weekend festival on May 8-10.

The Melton Constable Railway Heritage Festival, funded by Historic England as part of its Everyday Heritage grant programme, will be held at Melton Constable Country Club, the former Railway Institute, and St Mary's Church in Burgh Parva and the tin tabernacle 'the Railway Church,' which was installed for use by railwaymen and their families, and which recently reopened for services.

Caroline McGhie starts the event at 7.30pm on May 8 with a talk at the country club about how the village inspired her novel The Sitter.

An exhibition, Melton Constable: The Village Shaped by Steam, with artwork by children from nearby Astley Primary School, will open at 10am on the Saturday and Sunday, while the Embroidery Group will be stitching a new altar frontal with a railway theme. There will also be Blue Plaque activities for youngsters and special exhibitions by the Melton

The village sign highlighting its proud railway heritage.

Constable History Group. At 11am on Saturday morning at the country club, author Hazel Mindham will talk about her book The Men of Melton Constable, people who died in world wars, while the afternoon will feature a talk by H J Jackson, the local and veteran lino cutter, called End of the Line: An Artist's View of the Departure of the M&GN Railway.

Derek Haynes and Paul Young will give a talk on Norfolk Railways: Their Past, Present and Future at 7pm.

The movie The Great St Trinian's Train Robbery will be screened in the country club on Sunday at 11am, and there will be a two-hour guided railway walk led by Nigel Digby. Fakenham Town Band will give a concert at 2pm on the Sunday.

Proceeds from the festival will be used to repair both the tin tabernacle and All Saints' Church in nearby Briston.

It's back to Butterley for 7F

SOMERSET & Dorset Joint Railway 7F 2-8-0 No. 13809 (53809) is returning to its Midland Railway – Butterley home after 10 years of running at other heritage lines, including the West Somerset Railway and most recently the North Norfolk Railway, where it was withdrawn in December 2025. The 7F will be displayed inside The Matthew Kirtley Building at Swanwick Junction pending a full overhaul and return to steam.

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The owners currently use the whole as a private residence ideal for an extended family or could readily re-open as a guest house. There are sheltered gardens with large ornamental pond, a unique cabin, extensive parking and two paddocks in an idyllic rural setting with pleasing views over the adjoining countryside.

LET'S FINISH THE JOB!

JOIN THE 876 CLUB TODAY AND HELP US TO RAISE THE LAST £65,033 TO RETURN LNER CLASS J21 TO STEAM

Following the support of the National Lottery Heritage Fund and our generous supporters, the Locomotive Conservation & Learning Trust is nearing the completion of the restoration of class J21 No. 876 (later BR No. 65033). Built in 1889 and preserved in 1962, the 'Stainmore Survivor' last steamed in 1984. The extensive restoration No. 876 has been underway since 2014 at a total estimated cost of £650,000.

The condition of the locomotive has been far worse than we expected which has increased the time and cost of the project but we are now on the home stretch and about to finally reassemble it. To return this unique and wonderful locomotive to steam we now need to raise the remaining £65,033 to finish the job. Please help us by joining the 876 Club.

REGULAR PROJECT UPDATES ON OUR BLOG: https://ksetransport.blogspot.com

Benefits of joining The 876 Club:

• A supporters' pin badge • A monthly newsletter • An invitation to our annual Supporters' Day
• Two tickets for the launch event for No. 876's return to steam • A day's footplate experience on No. 876, learning to drive and fire it

Membership of The 876 Club is available for either a single donation of £876, or a 10 monthly-instalments of £87.60. To join please:

• Use either the PayPal link or download the form at **www.lclt.org.uk**
• Email the LCLT at **lclt.chairman@gmail.com**
• Or else to find out more how you can help, contact the LCLT at:
LCLT Chairman, Stone Flagged Cottage, Newbiggin, Leyburn, North Yorkshire, DL8 3TD

GET ON-BOARD TODAY AND HELP US TO RETURN THE STAINMORE SURVIVOR TO STEAM!

Appeal to safeguard Northamptonshire locomotive's future at heritage railway

By Owen Hayward

THE Northampton & Lamport Railway has appealed for donations to help it purchase a Hawthorn Leslie 0-6-0ST which, although already resident on the line, is currently privately owned.

No. 3837 was built in 1934 for Stewarts & Lloyds Ltd's Corby iron and steelworks, where it worked until withdrawn in 1969. Originally, it was S&L's No. 11 and rennumbered 16 as another locomotive already carried the original one. After withdrawal, in 1974, it was preserved at the Nene Valley Railway, later moving to the Battlefield Line in 1981 and to the Swanage Railway in 1982, although never ran at these.

From 1985, it went on display at the now-defunct Leatherhead Water Park in Usrrey; in 2010, it was purchased by The Hawthorn Leslie 3837 Preservation Society for only £1 and moved to the Lavender Line at Isfield. Although a start was made on its restoration, its poor condition meant that progress was slow and in 2018, ownership passed to the Epping Ongar Railway.

In 2025, No. 3837 was sold to an undisclosed buyer who took it to the NLR for storage but has now offered it to the railway, which must raise £9000 to complete the purchase.

"We are appealing for donations to the purchase cost and an initial cosmetic overhaul so it can be displayed in the station and the public can have access to the cab of this fine piece of Northamptonshire's industrial heritage," a statement said.

"The locomotive has not steamed since 1969 but is largely complete, and some initial restoration has already been undertaken by the previous owners. Long-term, the intention is to undertake a full restoration and return S&L No. 16 to steam. However, it will have to wait its turn in the queue while the overhaul of Andrew Barclay 0-6-0T No. 1605 *Ajax* is completed."

NLR chairman Adam Giles added: "Taking ownership of No. 16 is a fantastic opportunity for the NLR, especially as we celebrate our 30th anniversary of opening to the public back in 1996. These type of engines proved to be extremely strong and reliable, and they were favourites among the enginemen at Corby.

Former Corby steelworks No. 16 is currently stored at the Northampton & Lamport Railway, which is now seeking to raise £9000 to purchase the locomotive from its private owner. NLR

"No. 16 will be ideal for our two-mile line, and the relatively large cab will be prove useful for driver experiences.

"There is a lot of work to do to get it back into steam, but we really hope the public will support our initial appeal towards purchasing and completing a cosmetic overhaul in time for our big 30th anniversary gala this coming August bank holiday weekend".

Donations can be pledged at tinyurl.com/Northampton-Corby-Appeal

It was also announced that L&YR Class 27 0-6-0 No. 52322 will be visiting from the East Lancashire Railway for the August 29-31 anniversary celebrations.

Manchester Ship Canal relived at Bury photographic session

MEMORIES of the Manchester Ship Canal Railway were rekindled on March 20 when the East Lancashire Railway's 3P20 Parcel Group ran an afternoon and evening photographic charter.

The event featured two members of the MSC locomotive fleet which operated on its line around Trafford Park in Hudswell Clarke pair 0-6-0T No. 680 of 1903 No. 32 *Gothenburg* and 6wDM No. 4002 of 1959 *Arundel Castle*. During the afternoon, *Gothenburg* performed runpasts in Burrs Country Park before returning to Castlecroft yard, where both locomotives shunted appropriate stock in front of the former goods shed into the night. *Gothenburg* was repainted into its MSC grey colour scheme last autumn but is due to be repainted to portray Thomas the Tank Engine ahead of the ELR's first character event in May.

No. 32 *Gothenburg* on a freight working during the East Lancashire Railway charter of March 20. MIKE HEATH

Manchester Ship Canal pair No. 4002 *Arundel Castle* and No. 32 *Gothenburg* shunting at Castlecroft on March 20. MIKE HEATH

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Take home a Scottish 'Tractor' in miniature!

The Scottish Railway Preservation Society's flagship Class 37 is being produced in its 1994 refurbished BR green livery in OO scale by Accurascale. ACCURASCALE

THE Bo'ness-based Scottish Railway Preservation Society is providing enthusiasts an opportunity to take home on member of its fleet – in OO scale, that is.

The charity has partnered with model railway firm Accurascale to see its flagship Class 37 produced utilising the manufacturer's high-spec tooling for the locomotive, with a donation from each going towards to the upkeep of the real thing.

No. 37403 was the penultimate of 309 English Electric Class 37s to be built at Vulcan Foundry, Newton-le-Willows, entering service in South Wales as D6607 in October 1965. In 1984, it was selected to receive life extension work at Crewe, where it was overhauled and fitted with Electric Train Heating equipment for use on passenger trains in Scotland. No. 37403 was released into traffic following overhaul on June 26 the following year.

Allocated to Eastfield depot in Glasgow, it spent most of its life operating along the West Highland Line to Oban, Fort William and Mallaig before being replaced by more modern 'Sprinter' units in 1989. It moved south in the late 1990s under EWS ownership, working passenger services including between Cardiff and Weymouth, along the North Wales Coast and sleeper trains.

In February 1994, the locomotive was repainted into original BR green by Trainload Freight West (later Transrail) to mark the centenary of the West Highland Line. Restored at BRML Springburn with authentic details including its original D6607 number and Eastfield plaques, it also received the name *Ben Cruachan*, transferred from classmate No. 37404, before being withdrawn at Toton in March 2000.

In 2008, it was acquired by BRE Ltd, which later became the SRPS, and arrived at Bo'ness that November for an overhaul to commence that saw it return to main line operation in 2016; it now carries the number 37403 and name *Isle of Mull,* and it can be found working the majority of the SRPS railtours in and around Scotland.

The model of this locomotive depicts its 1994 condition, carrying BR green and the *Ben Cruachan* name, for which a set of etched nameplates will be provided, to be fitted separately should modellers so desire. Models can be ordered exclusively through www.accurascale.com and are priced at £189.95 for DCC-ready versions, with the SRPS receiving a donation from the sale of each to support its work in maintaining its collection at the Bo'ness & Kinneil Railway.

➜ **For more model announcements, see Model News, pages 80/81.**

Thomas returns to the Moorsline

THOMAS the Tank Engine will be heading to the North Yorkshire Moors Railway in May, marking the first time since 2004 that the line has hosted such an event.

Once a common fixture at a numerous UK heritage railways, Thomas events gradually declined in number since the turn of the century as the licence holder changed and restrictions and costs turned lines to other character options. They have started to reappear at some lines in recent years, such as the Spa Valley Railway in 2024, with the Moorsline the latest to add it to its calendar.

Days Out With Thomas events offer a chance to ride behind the titular character, meet Sir Topham Hatt, and enjoy live shows with station sweepers Rusty and Dusty.

The NYMR events take place on May 23-27 and 29-31, during which rides will also be available aboard the visiting NER petrol-electric Autocar No. 3170, which will run between Levisham and Pickering, where Thomas will be giving rides around the station.

For full event details, visit www.nymr.co.uk/Event/dowt

Winners: The team at the King and Castle pub in Kidderminster are delighted with their CAMRA Gold Award. SVR

Severn Valley's King and Castle is tops in CAMRA list!

THE Severn Valley Railway's King and Castle pub at Kidderminster Town station has been named Pub of the Year (Gold Award) by the Wyre Forest branch of the Campaign for Real Ale.

The prestigious award followed a rigorous judging process, with pubs first nominated onto a shortlist and then independently assessed by CAMRA members acting as 'secret shoppers.' Drinks quality, staff knowledge, décor and atmosphere, welcome, and community focus were assessed by the judges.

The SVR's visitor experience manager, Nicky Freeman, said: "Our team has worked incredibly hard to establish the King and Castle as a true community hub, under the leadership of joint managers Chris Dainty and Kat Forty. Chris has been instrumental in maintaining exceptional standards across our beer selection, while Kat has transformed the venue's social offering with a vibrant programme of live music, quizzes and al fresco events on our beautiful station concourse.

"This award is a fantastic recognition of the whole team's dedication."

The pub is open Tuesdays to Sundays, with hot food available from noon to 4pm.

West Lancashire's facilities expansion supported by grant

A £200,000 project to expand the West Lancashire Light Railway's visitor and educational facilities has been given a strong kick-start thanks to nearly 75% of the cost being covered through grant funding.

The new multi-purpose building will provide the 2ft gauge railway, located at Hesketh Bank, south west of Preston, with a new 40-seat tearoom for use on operating days, with the space able to double up as a classroom for the many educational visits the railway hosts and a training room for volunteers and meeting space. Construction has already begun, and the building will be named Y Caban, after North Wales quarrymen's shelters, some of the railway's steam locomotives having come from these environments.

The estimated total cost has seen support come from the Rural England Prosperity Fund and the West Lancashire Borough Council Community Infrastructure Levy, which have provided £155,000 of funding enabling the work to start. However, the remaining £45,000 still needs to be raised through donations, members, and other supporters.

An artist's impression of the WLLR's new Y Caban which is now being constructed. WLLR

A railway statement said: "Our wish is to provide our visitors, community and volunteers with a warm meeting place of friendships and learning."

➜ **To support the project, including GiftAiding donations, visit tinyurl.com/WLLR-Y-Cabin**

New model railway at Hunstanton

A MODEL railway has been unveiled in the Hunstanton Heritage Centre, celebrating the Norfolk seaside resort's branch line from King's Lynn which closed in 1969.

Built by King's Lynn Model Railway Club in about six weeks, it runs round the walls of the centre's Railway Room, which contains memorabilia and photographs of the branch.

The centre occupies the former NatWest bank on the corner of Northgate and Greevegate in the town.

Admission to visit the model railway is free.

Bluebell mixes it up for annual springtime gala

By Owen Hayward

A SHAKE-UP to its usual spring gala format saw the Bluebell Railway's March 20-22 event ditch the branch line theme in favour of a perceptibly more general locomotive line-up, but one that still managed to draw the crowds to Sussex, boosted no doubt by a glorious weekend of sunshine after a damp start to 2026.

In recent years, the Bluebell's first big gala of its annual calendar has been themed around smaller locomotives and workings once found on rural routes across Britain's rail network. Having been a popular theme, contrasting the autumn Giants of Steam weekend, showcasing larger and more powerful locomotives, it came as a surprise to some that for 2026 the guest line-up took a less focused approach, with three very different locomotives appearing alongside the railway's own.

Marketing officer James Cummins said that this change allows the railway to "be more flexible with locomotive availability and operational planning, ensuring that the railway can deliver a high-quality event for our visitors while making the most of the resources available to us."

It might partly be attributed to a general lack of available locomotives within the sector. However, the railway pulled off something that offered a chance to compare an array of locomotives from different eras and built for different purposes, all running to a timetable that was no less intensive than what has come to be expected of gala events there.

Little meets large

For many, it was the appearance of LBSCR A1X 0-6-0T 'Terrier' No. W8 *Freshwater* that captured interest; normally resident at the Isle of Wight Steam Railway, it returned to service last February (as reported in *Heritage Railway* issue 330), and this was its first trip away since then. Being fitted for air brakes only, it ran in tandem with the Bluebell's A1 example, No. 72 *Fenchurch*, the latter providing the vacuum braking required for the carriages on all the pair's booked workings. Turned out in SR olive green and LBSCR improved engine green respectively, these two further gave an opportunity to compare aesthetics and performance of similar members of the same general class.

Right: The gala saw Bluebell volunteer and former BR fireman Chris Stevens (centre) reunited with BR Standard 4MT No. 75069, which he crewed multiple times during his footplate career at Norwood Junction. OWEN HAYWARD

Meanwhile, BR 4MT 4-6-0 No. 75069 brought a touch of Nationalisation power to matters. Much like the Terriers, it was a Southern Region locomotive, but unlike its pre-Grouping elders (which were initially built to work commuter services out of and around the capital), the BR Standard was designed to handle all types of traffic from the outset.

Currently the only operating member of the class fitted with a double chimney, it presented a chance to compare tender with tank, with resident 2-6-4T example No. 80151 also on the roster; a third BR Standard running was 5MT 4-6-0 No. 73082 *Camelot*.

The Friday morning brought with it a reunion of old friends. Footplate volunteer Chris Stevens was a fireman out of Norwood Junction during his BR footplate career, during which time he worked on No. 75069. The opportunity was presented to spend the day travelling on the footplate of one of his former steeds, evoking memories of times when this would have been a common occurrence.

Rounding off the guest list was GWR 2900 Saint class No. 2999 *Lady of Legend*, which has remained on the railway following its appearance at the new-build steam-themed Giants

History was made at Horsted Keynes on March 20 when the recently-refurbished Platform 1 welcomed its first passenger-carrying arrival in preservation – and possibly since as far back as 1914! The train was led by visiting 'Terrier' W8 *Freshwater*, plus resident Nos. 72 *Fenchurch* and 80151. OWEN HAYWARD

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No. 80151 passes the site of West Hoathly station on March 21. The site behind was once home to a brickworks but is due to undergo redevelopment, with more than 100 new homes approved for construction, meaning the view here could soon change dramatically. JAMES KINDRED

On loan from Didcot Railway Centre for the majority of 2026, *Lady of Legend* passes Waterworks with the Pullman-Maunsell rake, reminiscent of formations once seen on boat train workings between London and ports such as Dover and Southampton on the Southern Region. OWEN HAYWARD

of Steam gala in October 2025 (issue 339).

With WR Modified Hall No. 6989 *Wightwick Hall* currently on tour and booked for further Harry Potter filming sessions during the months ahead, *Lady of Legend* will be staying in Sussex until the autumn thanks to the Great Western Society. In exchange, H2 Atlantic No. 32424 *Beachy Head* (absent from this event as it was undergoing maintenance) will soon head to Didcot Railway Centre to appear at the May 23/24 Heritage in Motion weekend, which will showcase the 4-4-2 against other engineering gems such as Wickham trolleys, wheeldrop and locomotive hoist demonstrations in the workshops, and examples of the museum's own fleet in action.

Completing the line-up for the Bluebell's event were rebuilt SR Battle of Britain class 4-6-2 No. 34059 *Sir Archibald Sinclair* (the class having been designed as a versatile, lightweight alternative to the Merchant Navy Pacifics) and SECR O1 0-6-0 No. 65 (the design introduced as the O class for goods work between 1878 and 1899, with some rebuilt between 1900 and 1932 and reclassified as O1), bringing a total of eight locomotives working across the three days. The latter is now in its final year of service before the expiration of its boiler certificate sees it withdrawn to await overhaul.

Another Horsted first

On October 18 last year, visiting new-build No. 6880 *Betton Grange* made preservation history when it worked the first timetabled passenger service to depart from the newly-refurbished Platform 1 at Horsted Keynes, which had not been used in this manner since about 1941, having been converted into a goods siding. The stock had started the day there, and a subsequent departure from the same platform later in the event was also shunted into place empty, meaning a passenger-carrying service had yet to arrive in it. This changed on the first day of the March event, with the honour going to a triple-headed service led by *Freshwater*, *Fenchurch* and No. 80151. Rather fittingly, all locomotives were built at Brighton Works, which had once used some of the sidings here to store numerous locomotives when faced with a backlog of work in the early 1900s.

There is still work to be done on Platform 1; while the set-up of the station means it will always be one for terminating trains arriving from the north, a point at the south end currently awaits relocation before the track can be linked up once more and locomotives able to run round.

On this occasion, the arriving train saw *Camelot* attach to the rear and take the stock back towards East Grinstead.

One of the unique selling points of a Bluebell gala is the ability to make up carriage sets from a multitude of eras, and one of these comprised the four ex-Metropolitan Railway Chesham vehicles, supplemented by a selection of four-wheeled carriages of LBSCR, LCDR and SECR origins. A second consist was made up using a combination of BR(S) green Mk. 1s and Bulleid carriages. The last two rakes were made up with carriages normally found on dining services: the third rake was formed using four blood and custard-liveried Mk. 1s (used on the railway's 'Wealden Rambler' afternoon tea services), with the LNWR observation saloon at the south end, while the final set saw two of the line's fine-dining Pullman cars supplement four SR Maunsell carriages, including Hastings brake third No. 3687 (which won the rolling stock award at the Heritage Railway Association's 2026 awards in Llandudno, as reported last issue) and third open No. 1309, which was making its final appearance in service prior to being withdrawn to await overhaul.

The inclusion of the Pullmans follows a very successful trial at the 65th anniversary gala in August 2025, when, for a supplementary fare of £10, travel aboard these carriages came with either a breakfast roll or tea and cake.

Having gone down a storm each day, this time the fare was increased to £15, with a full cooked breakfast on the first trip each day or a cream tea and cake on subsequent ones; once again, these sold incredibly well, highlighting the appetite that good value upsells can bring to a railway.

This set-up is expected to be repeated at the August 7-9 Bluebell on Parade and October 16-17 Giants of Steam events.

Left: *Freshwater* and *Fenchurch* work a train of vintage wooden-bodied carriages up Freshfield Bank and away from Sheffield Park. OWEN HAYWARD

Double Standards: visiting 4MT No. 75069 leads 5MT No. 73082 *Camelot* through Leamlands Wood as the pair depart Horsted Keynes with an East Grinstead-bound working on March 21. ADAM ASHFORD

Left: O1 No. 65 arrives at Horsted Keynes while No. 34059 *Sir Archibald Sinclair* waits on the Ardingly spur ready to attach to the rear of the stock to take over the return journey to Sheffield Park. PAUL LAWRENCE

An additional guest locomotive was being negotiated for the latter event, for which unique BR Standard Class 8 No. 71000 *Duke of Gloucester* has already announced, although it had not been confirmed as this issue went to press.

Ahead of this event, No. 80151 is due to be turned to face north for the first time in preservation.

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Robin Jones

Editor

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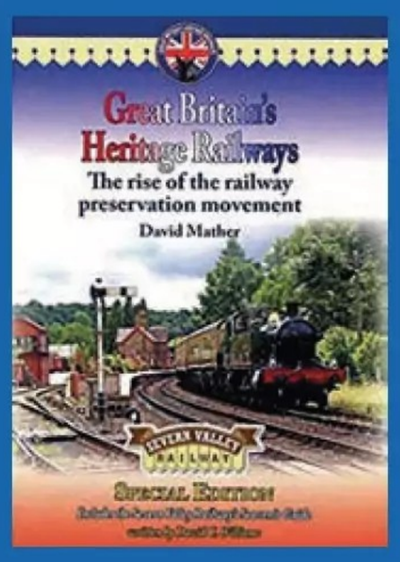

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Poppy Line's accessible travel boosted by homestay travel firm

By Owen Hayward

This external mock-up shows how the proposed modified Mk. 1 might look once adapted to be an accessible vehicle, with new double doors set to allow wheelchair users to travel aboard the NNR's dining services for the first time.
STEVE ALLEN/NNR

ENSURING that a variety of services are accessible to as many people as possible is a prominent thought for many heritage lines, and the North Norfolk Railway has been given a financial boost to help improve its own offerings thanks to travel firm Airbnb's new Best of British Fund, which will see a Mk. 1 carriage adapted to offer a wheelchair-friendly space aboard its popular dining services.

The fund, launched in partnership with Visit Britain, sets aside £1 million to support local hospitality and seeks to celebrate traditions and experiences that make British tourism unique and unforgettable.

The NNR applied for support with its upcoming project to convert an existing coach into an accessible saloon, allowing visitors with additional mobility needs to enjoy journeys into the past with facilities purpose-built to support them.

Once converted, the coach will give the line the opportunity to also welcome visitors with additional mobility needs aboard its dining trains for the first time.

NNR general manager Graham Hukins said: "We are delighted to have received this support which will allow us to better welcome all our visitors. When these carriages were first built in the 1950s and 1960s, accessibility was not considered as it is nowadays, and with many specialist skills needed to complete a project such as this, it would simply not be possible without external funding support.

"With the overall project set to cost about £250,000, grants of this nature really are invaluable. Our team are continuing to seek out other funding opportunities."

The NNR is one of 25 successful applicants, and the only one in East Anglia, with the grant being awarded under the category of Culture and Heritage. Other winners were drawn from Food and Dining, Music and Arts and Nature and Outdoors and included Truro farmers' market, the Lyme Regis Museum and Wigtown book festival.

Luke Impett, partnerships and external affairs senior manager for Airbnb UK, said: "Congratulations to NNR on being named a winner of Airbnb's Best of British Fund. Affectionately known as the 'Poppy Line,' it offers a truly special way to experience the beauty of the Norfolk coast, bringing together heritage, storytelling and unforgettable journeys through stunning landscapes.

"Run largely by passionate volunteers and loved by visitors from around the UK and beyond, it's a brilliant example of how local communities come together to preserve and celebrate their history. We're proud to support its continued work, helping more people step back in time, connect with Britain's rich railway heritage and discover remarkable destinations like North Norfolk."

Severn Valley landowners warned falling trees could inflict even more damage

OWNERS of land alongside the Severn Valley Railway have been warned about their liability for trees on their properties following the devastating Mor Brook landslip on January 29 last year.

The embankment slippage near Sterns damaged a bridge's wing wall, causing it to collapse, severing the line between Eardington and Hampton Loade stations.

However, despite fears that repairs could have taken up to 12 months to be completed, the line was reinstated in just six months, earning the line the Chairman's Special Award at the Heritage Railway Association Annual awards 2026 presented at Llandudno on March 7, as reported in *Heritage Railway* issue 343. SVR managing director Gus Dunster said: "The serious landslip last year at Mor Brook bridge resulted in the closure of the northern section of the Severn Valley line for almost six months.

"Following this, and on the advice of our consultant civil engineer and our insurers, we wrote to adjacent landowners reminding them of their legal obligations.

"This is something that Network Rail also do periodically with neighbouring landowners.

"Changing weather patterns and more extreme weather events such as convective rainfall are now routine, because of the impact of climate change. This presents a significantly increased risk of trees falling as we've seen across the country in recent years."

The SVR has also been recognised with a special honour for outstanding resilience at the Visit Worcestershire 2025/26 Awards for Tourism at a ceremony at the Three Counties Showground.

Judges created the award to shine a light on a business that has demonstrated exceptional strength, adaptability and commitment during challenging times, while continuing to deliver high-quality visitor experiences and safeguarding its heritage.

Proud Severn Valley Railway officials presented with the Heritage Railway Association Chairman's Special Award at Venue Cymru in Llandudno on March 7 for the repair of the Mor Brook bridge landslip in half the anticipated time.
JACK BOSKETT/HRA

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‘Electro-steam’ another UK first at Audley End

By Robin Jones

A NEW fully-electric steam-outline locomotive, which is set to make its debut at the Audley End Miniature Railway later this year, will be the first of its type in Britain.

The locomotive is not only designed to look and sound like a traditional scale steam engine while running entirely on electricity, but it also produces steam, preserving the nostalgic sights and sounds that generations of families associate with their visits to Audley End.

“This makes it one of the most innovative developments in the UK’s miniature steam railway sector, combining sustainability with heritage charm,” said a statement from the 10 ¼in gauge railway, currently marketed as the Audley End Enchanted Railway. “As a woodland-based attraction, sustainability matters deeply to us. The introduction of electric locomotives allows us to reduce emissions, lower environmental impact, improve reliability during busy seasonal events and protect the surrounding forest environment.

“While coal-fired steam trains remain an important part of our story, investing in electric technology ensures we can continue offering magical train rides in Essex for decades to come.”

Marking its 60th anniversary in 2024, the line debuted new battery-electric Bo-Bo No. 60 *Electra*, the first of its kind in the UK and, once the design was certified by the Office of Rail & Road, it officially became No. 001 of the new Evolution class – No. EV001 – and was both the first new-build commercial electric locomotive for a UK narrow gauge line and the first new traction at Audley End in 40 years.

Designed and built by specialist engineers at The Steam Workshop in West Yorkshire, *Electra* has been credited with bringing cleaner, quieter and more reliable journeys to the woodland railway.

A CAD depiction of the pioneering new electric steam-outline locomotive for Audley End. AEMR

GWR 2-8-0 No. 3802 renamed *The Lady of Llangollen*. LR

Celebrating the Ladies of Llangollen with renaming

THE Llangollen Railway temporarily renamed its GWR freight 2-8-0 No. 3802 *The Lady of Llangollen,* complete with headboard, for the March 14/15 Mother’s Day weekend celebrations.

The event formed part of a wider Women of the Railway programme, honouring both historic and modern figures linked to the Dee Valley, including the Ladies of Llangollen, Eleanor Butler (1739-1829) and Sarah Ponsonby (1755-1831), upper-class Irish women who lived together.

Modern railway contributors were also in the spotlight, including Llangollen stationmaster Mandy Towers and Anita Piatkowska, who served visitors on the popular afternoon tea trains which sold out before the event.

Anita said: “Mother’s Day weekend provides a wonderful opportunity to celebrate the remarkable contribution women have made and continue to make to the story of Llangollen and the success of the railway. Renaming No. 3802 as *The Lady of Llangollen* reflects both our heritage and the family spirit that is so central to our organisation.”

Former Welsh station that became seven-bedroom country house could now be yours!

By Robin Jones

A NORTH Wales station which saw its last train 64 years ago is for sale, with offers in the region of £825,000 invited.

The former Eyarth station in Llanfair Dyffryn, Clwyd, on the Denbigh, Ruthin & Corwen Railway (later part of the LNWR), opened in 1864 and was a regular stopping point for trains. The last passenger train was recorded in 1953 and the final goods train in 1962, after which the line and station closed. The station was subsequently converted into a seven-bedroom country home and for much of the last 40 years was a successful guest house, with the ticket office and station platform still visible today.

The original well that provided water for the stationmaster also survives, and there are paddocks and stables and a kitchen garden. The property is set in extensive grounds of about 2.5 acres and is being marketed by North Wales estate and lettings agent Cavendish, which has offices in Mold and Ruthin. Sales manager Christie Gibson said: “This is a wonderful opportunity to purchase an outstanding country home which retains key elements of its past as a railway station, including part of the original platform, ticket office and even the station well, all of which have been carefully preserved and incorporated into the building.

“The unique blend of local railway heritage and sensitive restoration makes it a rare and character-filled example of how historic buildings can be reimagined while honouring their past.”

For the last 11 years, Eyarth station has been home to Michelle and James Cunningham, who relocated from Merseyside. “Over the years, we’ve had many people either staying when we were a guest house or just stopping by because they have a connection with the old station” Michelle said. “Stories have included relatives whose great-grandmother had begun her journey to a new life in America from Eyarth station, while another couple’s romance blossomed here because the man worked at the station and his girlfriend worked in nearby Eyarth Hall, and this would be a regular meeting point.

“There was even a story that the former Prince of Wales, later Edward VII, was having an affair with a local lady aristocrat and would get off at Eyarth rather than the busier Ruthin station to avoid being noticed.”

➜ For more details, visit www.cavendishproperties.co.uk or see the advertisement on page 25.

A train passes through Eyarth station. CAVENDISH

Eyarth station today is a country house. CAVENDISH

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J21 overhaul boosted with £30k gift

By Robin Jones

A MYSTERY donor has contributed more than £30,000 towards the six-year refurbishment and return to steam of unique NER 0-6-0 J21 No. 65033.

With the extensively refurbished boiler well advanced, as reported last issue, attention will switch to building the rolling chassis in the Locomotive Maintenance Services workshops in Loughborough – but funding is increasingly a challenge.

LCLT chairman Toby Watkins said: "Much time and money has been invested by our supporters and the National Lottery Heritage Fund, but money is running out and it would be heartbreaking after all we've been through to pause the project while we find extra funding.

"An anonymous donor has pledged more than £30,000, which will keep us going for a bit, but we still have a hole to plug. Thankfully, we are now assembling the locomotive so people can see and understand that this is going to happen, providing we find the cash.

"While the loco did run for a while at Beamish, this is essentially the first time it has been restored. The bare minimum was done following withdrawal in 1962 to get it running again in a different safety environment and so major issues were either not identified or not addressed.

"We have painstakingly taken on every engineering challenge this engine has thrown at us; we have not cut a single corner, which is why we are significantly over budget. The pain now will be worth it when we all get to enjoy years of steam from this lovely unique locomotive."

The North of England Museum at Beamish has just transferred two NER P7 hopper wagons to the LCLT for restoration at Kirkby Stephen East and use behind the J21. Further details of this and the wider NER 175 project will be announced shortly.

The LCLT continues to raise the essential money it needs to complete the J21 project. Details of its 876 Club and 1889 Club membership can be found at www.lclt.org.uk

Anyone interested in the project is welcome to contact Toby directly on lclt.chairman@gmail.com

Above: A J21 060 hauling a rake of P7 hopper wagons at Yanwath in Cumbria. LCLT

Left: One of the two P7 hopper wagons to be restored for use behind J21 No. 62033 at Kirkby Stephen East. LCLT

Back to 1960 for historic Simplex repaint

By Robin Jones

THE locomotive which hauled the debut passenger train on the world's first heritage railway to be built on a greenfield site by volunteers is being returned to its appearance on that historic day 66 years ago.

Motor-Rail Simplex4wDM No. 3995 of 1926 was supplied new to the Nocton Estates Railway, which operated for 23 miles across Nocton Fen in northern Lincolnshire, hauling loads of potatoes for Smiths Crisps and delivering beet to the sugar factory at Bardney. When built, it had no body, other than two metal bonnets covering the flywheel and other components. The driver had to face rain, snow, and icy blasts across the fenlands without any protection.

Before the Second World War it was converted from petrol to diesel power, and then a home-made wooden cab was fitted to give the driver some protection.

That was removed when the Simplex was sold in 1960 to the nascent Lincolnshire Coast Light Railway for the line being built to link the bus terminus in North Sea Lane, Humberston (near Cleethorpes), to the beach and the Fitties holiday camp. The job of providing a metal body was given to a sheet metal fabricating company at Grimsby Docks, and it has carried that for the past 65 years.

Teal & Mackrill Ltd, a Hull-based firm of marine and farm paint manufacturers, has given the railway, which is now based at the Skegness Waterside Leisure Park in Ingoldsmells, its Teamac Metalcote Enamel in Seine Net Blue (a colour traditionally associated with marine vessels) plus undercoat free of charge to return the locomotive to the livery it was finished in after the bodywork was fitted for it to appear again as it did on August 27, 1960, as part of the locomotive's centenary.

Repairs underway

A team of volunteers are now engaged on straightening damaged sections, removing old paintwork and rubbing down the bodywork ready for undercoating and the Seine Net Blue top coat. The locomotive's nameplate, *Paul* (bestowed in the mid-1960s), has been removed but will be refitted in due course.

The chairman of the LCLR's Historic Vehicles Trust, Richard Shepherd, said: "This is a wonderfully generous donation from Teal & Mackrill and will enable us to run our lovely pioneering Simplex in the state in which it operated the world's first passenger service to run on a heritage line built by enthusiasts. We still have active volunteers who remember it from those pioneering days at Humberston, but the work is being carried out by some of the volunteers who have joined us more recently in Skegness."

Left to right are Lincolnshire Coast Light Railway volunteers Aaron Knight, Matthew Forman-Clarke, Stuart Yates and Dianne Chalkley preparing to repaint the Simplex. CHRIS BATES/LCLR

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The UK delegation enjoyed a journey on the Alishan Forest Railway hauled by Mitsubishi diesel DL-50, a sister of DL-34, currently on loan to the Mid-Wales line. ALBERT WU/AFR

Welshpool & Llanfair Light Railway and Taiwan Sugar Corporation representatives with the Alishan Forest Railway railcar which returned to service at the March 7 event. TAISUGAR

Welshpool delegation reinforces Taiwanese rail partnership

By Robin Jones

THE international partnership between 2ft 6in gauge lines the Welshpool & Llanfair Light Railway and Alishan Forest Railway and the Cultural Heritage Office in Taiwan has passed a new milestone.

WLLR chair Anne-Marie Wright, who took over the position last year, led an official delegation to Taiwan in March, accompanied by WLLR vice-president Tony Thorndike, company secretary Michael Reilly and a delegation of 18 members and enthusiasts.

The Taiwan Sugar Corporation operates heritage lines on some of its former sugar cane railways. In 2005, the W&LLR purchased one of its redundant diesels, 0-6-0DM No. 17 *Diema*, from the sugar operation, which has remained in Wales since. This acquisition led to the signing of an affiliation agreement in 2018 between TSC and the W&LLR.

On March 7, members of the international delegation were special guests at an 80th anniversary celebration for the TSC, held at a cultural park which sits on the site of the former Suantou sugar factory. Welcomed by TSC chairman Wu Ming-chang, the party travelled on a railcar dating from before the Second World War which returned to service at the celebration, and trains running during the event were decorated to reflect the close ties between TSC and the W&LLR.

During the following three days, the delegation took part in a cultural exchange on the AFR, being received by Wang Chao-Pao, director of the AFR and CHO, for what was described as a celebration of the deep-seated friendship between the two railways.

The party also travelled on the line into the Alishan mountains and viewed a special exhibition on the AFR's history to learn how it is integrating ecological conservation, cultural heritage preservation and landscape harmony into the challenging engineering of its track maintenance and numerous tunnels.

The bond between the organisations was further strengthened by the signing of an extension to the November 2022 loan agreement for Mitsubishi Bo-Bo DL-34, which will see the diesel operating in Wales until at least 2030.

This new deal followed a recent five-day working visit to the AFR

Left: Welshpool chairman Anne-Marie Wright signs an extension to the loan of Japanese-built Bo-Bo DL-34 with Alishan Forest Railway and Cultural Heritage Office director Wang Chao-Pao. ALBERT WU/AFR

by WLLR general manager James Brett and workshop manager Joe Gunby, which the AFR said had demonstrated the transition of the relationship from initial cultural promotion to a robust partnership in mechanical engineering and technical cooperation.

Chao-Pao stated: "From the technical exchanges at the beginning of the year to today's signing, it is evident that the cooperation between the AFR and the W&LLR has advanced from 'mutual recognition' to a profound stage of 'technical synergy'.

"The continuation of DL-34's mission in the UK is not merely an extension of our friendship, but also a shared commitment to our cultural responsibilities toward heritage railways."

Anne-Marie added: "We at the W&LLR greatly value our relationships with our friends in Taiwan, which have proven beneficial for both sides.

"We have been able to make available our long experience of heritage preservation while promoting the Taiwanese lines to UK enthusiasts, while as well as the very useful loan of the diesel DL-34, we have seen an increase in visitors from the Far East thanks to promotion of our railway in Taiwan."

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The Plym Valley Railway held its first-ever evening photographic session on March 14. The sold-out event at Marsh Mills station had five items of diesel traction displayed under floodlighting between 7pm and 9pm. They were Class 08 D13002, Sentinel 0-4-0DH No.10077 (which has been repainted in Intercity Swallow livery and featured in Alstom's The Greatest Gathering Railway 200 event at Derby last year), 'Pacers' Class 142 No. 142023 and Class 143 No. 143618, and Class 43 High Speed Train power car No. 43063, given to the heritage line by Great Western Railway and restored in Swallow livery, although its power unit has been removed for use elsewhere. PVR

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Glasgow 'Caley' offices for sale

By Hugh Dougherty

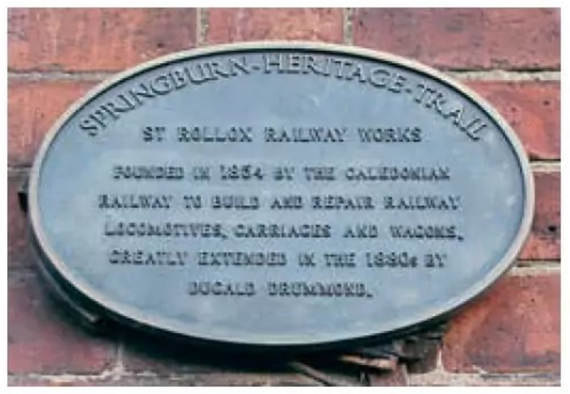
THE B-listed former offices of the Caledonian Railway's St Rollox Works are on the market for an asking price of £250,000.

The sale of this iconic piece of 1887-built Springburn Railway heritage, better known as 'The Caley,' comes after it ceased to be used as a nursery school and offices when it was not included in the 2024 takeover of the entire works estate by Optical Express tycoon David Moulsdale. Bids are being sought by estate agent Graham + Sibbald, with uses listed including office space provision and commercial activities. The building carries a plaque recording the opening of the works in 1854 and its expansion by Dugald Drummond in the 1880s.

When then works owner, the train repair company Gemini, announced the end of railway work at The Caley in 2019, speculation was rife that Locomotive Services Limited was bidding to acquire the entire works site for heritage locomotive and rolling stock maintenance and storage. However, the LSL decided not to proceed with the acquisition, and in 2024, after some uncertainty surrounding its future, The Caley was acquired by Gibson's Engineering Limited.

Backed by David Moulsdale, the Gibson father-and-son team of Dougie and Fraser Gibson set about re-establishing the works as a train repair facility and were successful in attracting work from main line companies. On the heritage front, Gibson's fitted central locking and toilet containment tanks to Mk. 1 coaches from the Scottish Railway Preservation Society's railtours fleet for main line running.

The historic Caledonian Railway offices are for sale. HUGH DOUGHERTY



Above: Included in the sale is this heritage plaque recording the heyday of The Caley. HUGH DOUGHERTY

Left: The BR Engineering period is commemorated in the office building gates. HUGH DOUGHERTY

The company also forged links with the Doon Valley Railway, which loaned its Sentinel diesel for use as a works shunter. Gibson's announced that it had acquired the mothballed Dalrymple Junction to Dunaskin line from Network Rail for a test track, and that DVR trains would be able to run over the track.

However, both Gibsons left the company at the end of January, resigning as directors, and *Heritage Railway* understands that the company may be subject to rebranding, while the lease of the Dalrymple Junction-Dunaskin line has fallen through, dashing DVR hopes of having a four-mile run in addition to its existing two-mile running line.

Responding to a request to visit the Springburn Works for an interview with whoever is now in charge of the company to gain a clearer picture of current developments, a company spokeswoman said: "There may be a rebranding, and it would be better if you were to wait for two or three months before you visit us."

Railway lime kilns now protected by Historic England

A BANK of six lime kilns built by the Stanhope & Tyne Railway in 1835 have been given listed status.

One of the earliest structures designed by the railway engineer Thomas Harrison, Historic England has designated the kilns at Bantling Castle, Stanley, in County Durham, as a Scheduled Monument following work by local enthusiast Rob Langham.

The kilns are an early example of an industrial-scaled limeworks, one of the first industrial plants in the world that was specifically built by a railway company, and as a substantial structure, they form an impressive feature in the landscape.

Historic England took into account the well-documented connection between the kilns and the pioneering Stanhope & Tyne Railway, which was formed in 1832. The railway line opened its first section between Stanhope and Annfield, just east of Bantling Castle, on May 15, 1834, and was fully opened to coal drops on the Tyne at South Shields on September 10.

Harrison was the resident engineer, with Robert Stephenson as consulting engineer.

By April 1835, 50 to 60 chaldrons of lime were leaving the company's kilns at Stanhope every day for sale at depots down the line. The Bantling Castle kilns were constructed to further increase the supply of lime. However, the railway significantly over-estimated the demand for lime and, to cut costs, ceased lime production at Bantling Castle in 1839.

The kilns were restarted to supply the ironworks with lime, working until about 1850, and were sold to the Derwent Iron Company in 1852.

Harrison later became the engineer responsible for both Newcastle's High Level Bridge and the Royal Border Bridge. In the 1850s, he oversaw the merger which formed the North Eastern Railway for which he became the long-serving Chief Engineer and was consulted on the design of the Forth Bridge.

The long-overlooked Banting Castle lime kilns are now protected as a Scheduled Monument. ROB LANGHAM

Louise Scotcher, from Dee Valley Tours, who will be leading the trips up Pen y Pigyn for views of Corwen. LR

Corwen history unlocked with new rail and walking tour

THE Llangollen Railway has launched a new visitor experience combining a trip on the line with a guided town walk.

The railway has partnered with Dee Valley Tours to run Tren a Thref: The Corwen Heritage Adventure. Visitors will travel by train from Llangollen to Corwen before joining the walking tour and exploring the history, landscapes and legends of the market towns.

The first tours took place on April 1 and 8.

Passengers depart Llangollen at 10am, arriving in Corwen at 10.41am. The return train departs Corwen at 1.45pm, arriving back at 2.20pm.

The guided tours are led by Louise Scotcher, from Dee Valley Tours, and explore everything from the Iron Age hill fort at Caer Drewyn and Roman influences on the medieval church to the rise of Owain Glyndŵr and Corwen's role as an important coaching town in later centuries.

Visitors also have the option of joining a short walk up to Pen y Pigyn, a stunning viewpoint overlooking Corwen, the Dee Valley and the Clwydian Range. The walk also features local legends, including stories of the giant Drewyn and tales associated with Owain Glyndŵr himself.

Louise said: "This tour is a wonderful way to bring Corwen's history to life. The town has such a rich and fascinating story, from ancient hill forts and medieval legends to its role in Welsh history. Combining a heritage railway journey with a guided town walk allows visitors to experience the Dee Valley in a completely different way."

Tickets for the new experience are £30 per person, with children's tickets available for £6. The price includes a day rover ticket and the walking tour.

➜ **Further details are available at https://llan.hops.org.uk/tickets/special-events-in-2026/tren-a-thref**

Severn Railway Bridge parts are rediscovered after six decades

By Robin Jones

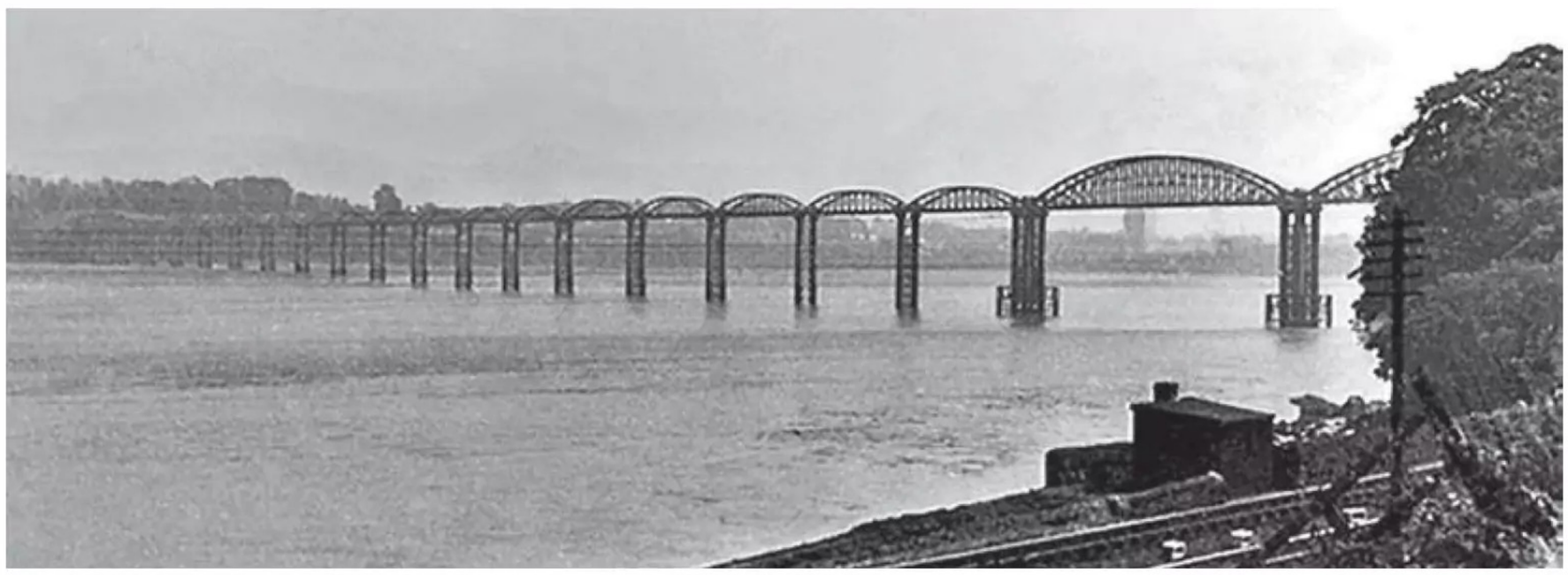
REMAINS of a railway bridge that was demolished after five men died after it was struck by two barges in 1960 have been uncovered by very low tides following this year's protracted winter rain.

While parts of the structure can be seen at low tide, heavy rain and the tides have washed away sediment, facilitating the exploration of the remains by Sharpness Lifeboat Station crew volunteers during a rescue training session.

The landmark 4162ft structure, which stood 70 feet above water level, was built in 1875-9 by the Severn Bridge Railway Company, mainly to carry coal from the mines in the Forest of Dean to Sharpness Docks. It was the furthest-downstream bridge over the river until the opening of the Severn Road Bridge, now the M48, in 1966. When the company got into financial difficulties in 1893, it was taken over jointly by the GWR and the Midland Railway, the single-track route becoming the Severn & Wye Junction Railway. The bridge was used for freight and passenger services until 1960, with temporary additional traffic when the Severn Tunnel was closed for engineering work.

Sharpness Lifeboat Station crew volunteers inspect the freshly uncovered remains of the bridge during a rescue training session. SARA

A lifeboat station crew volunteer stands on one of the toppled bridge pillars. SARA



The Severn Railway Bridge as seen from Purton in July, 1948. BEN BROOKSBANK/CREATIVE COMMONS

Collision and closure

However, in thick fog and on a strong tide on October 25, 1960, barges *Arkendale H* and *Wastdale H*, which had overshot Sharpness Dock, were carried upstream and collided with one of the columns of the bridge. Two bridge spans collapsed into the river and parts of the structure hit the barges, causing the fuel oil and petrol loads they were carrying to catch fire. The two captains managed to swim to shore, and an engineer was saved by men searching for the crew in a rowboat, but five other crew members died. The collapse of the bridge damaged the 12in-diameter gas main that ran alongside the railway, leaving households across the Forest of Dean without a mains gas supply.

Locals wanted to see the bridge repaired because it was an important community link, with Sharpness children travelling by train to school at Lydney left with a 40-mile detour via Gloucester. The Western Region aimed to rebuild the bridge, only for a capsized tanker to cause further damage to Pier 20 shortly before repairs were due to start. The same pier was struck again when the contractor's crane broke adrift. BR decided in 1965 that the bridge was damaged beyond economic repair and opted for demolition, which began in August 1967.

Some of the spans needed to be broken up in the river, with parts remaining intact and sinking into the bed instead of being recovered for scrap.

Remains discovered

On February 15, volunteer members of the Severn Area Rescue Association (SARA) undertook a local knowledge exercise by walking through mud, sand and water from Sharpness Lifeboat Station to the bridge remains site.

They discovered a complete section of the old bridge, complete with rails and the gas pipe that had been exposed, possibly by masses of freshwater. After exploring the wrecks, the crew safely returned to station and cleaned their muddy kit ready for service.

Crew member Luke Grinstead told the BBC that it was "just fantastic" to have the opportunity to visit the remains of the bridge. "To actually have the opportunity to go out there, to stand on it, to touch it, and actually be in the environment that the workers were in when they built and demolished it was a privilege," he said.

A SARA statement said: "With all the interest that our amazing community has shown, we wanted to highlight some important safety points for anybody thinking of taking a look themselves… our advice is don't!"

Work starts on Doon Valley rolling stock shed

WORK has started on the Doon Valley Railway's £206,000 heritage rolling stock shed which will allow the industrial line's locomotives, carriages and wagons to be kept fully under cover out of the Ayrshire weather at Dunaskin.

A large part of the funding, £128,000, came from the Coalfield Communities Landscape Partnership, reflecting the area's coalmining heritage, with the remaining £80,000 balance raised through an appeal. DVR chairman Archie Thom said: "We laid the foundations at the start of March to allow contractors to move in and erect the building. It's a concrete-floored, inlaid track, steel-framed, three-road shed which will accommodate all of our stock, and that's a real advance for us.

"As a retired teacher, I am particularly amused that we are recycling a redundant school as part of the project. We bought several tonnes of rubble from the recently demolished Auchinleck Academy, and it's being used as foundations, so education is being put to good use on the DVR!"

Contractors are erecting the shed to be available for use during the current operating season. When complete, it will externally closely resemble the Fife Heritage Railway's new rail-connected Exhibition Hall and Display Centre at its Kirkland Yard base in Leven.

Costing £480,000, with £366,000 grant-funded, the FHR shed is coming in at double the cost of the DVR facility, as it is being fitted out as a museum display space rather than simply a working rolling stock storage shed.

An impression of the Fife Heritage Railways Exhibition Hall and Display Centre. The Doon Valley shed will look very similar. FHR

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A splash of red set to dazzle the Cotswolds!

By Robin Jones

Caledonian Railway 0-4-4T No. 15189 following a repaint into LMS crimson lake livery at Bo'ness. JONATHAN GOURLAY/G/WR

CALEDONIAN Railway JF Mackintosh 439 0-4-4T No.15189, resplendent in the LMS crimson lake livery into which it was repainted last September, as reported in *Heritage Railway* issue 343, is the latest addition to the Gloucestershire Warwickshire Railway's premier event, the May 23-25 bank holiday weekend Cotswold Festival of Steam.

Visiting from the Bo'ness & Kinneil Railway, the locomotive previously carried BR black livery and Caledonian Railway blue before that. Its number has been picked out in gold leaf following the repaint.

Tom Willson, chairman of the event organising team, said: "This lovely engine is bound to turn an eye with its wonderful crimson-lake finish. We are looking forward to its arrival for the second time on our railway – last time it was here was in 2019, when it was blue – it's a very welcome return to the Cotswolds."

No. 15198, the sole survivor of 92 members of its class, was built at Glasgow's St. Rollox works in 1907 and given the number 419, becoming LMS No. 15189 when the CR was absorbed at the Grouping on 1923. It became No. 55189 following Nationalisation in 1948.

The last of the class to be withdrawn in 1962, the locomotive was bought by the Scottish Railway Preservation Society for £750.

The G/WR aims to operate up to eight locomotives in an intensive timetable with a non-stop run each day, double-headers, and a freight train on which visitors can ride in the brake vans.

Previously confirmed guests are Southern Railway Battle of Britain Pacific No. 34070 *Manston*, courtesy of the Swanage Railway and Southern Locomotives Limited, and GER 209 class 0-4-0ST No. 229, built in 1876, known as the 'Coffee Pot,' and owned by Bill Parker of the Flour Mill workshops at Bream in the Forest of Dean. The festival might also feature one example of diesel traction in GWR diesel railcar No. 22, fresh from its recent gala appearance at the East Somerset Railway and set to recreate history on the Cotswold line. These railcars were a familiar sight on the main line between Stratford-upon-Avon and Cheltenham in the 1930s and 1940s. No. 22 is one of only three survivors from the 38 built and the only one in working order. Its visit to Toddington continues its first tour away from its Didcot Railway Centre home since it was overhauled there. From the home fleet, GWR 2-8-0s Nos. 2807 and 3850 and new-build 4-6-0 No. 6880 *Betton Grange* will be rostered for festival duties.

The locomotive department at Toddington and the carriage and wagon department at Winchcombe will be open for visits by the public. On the Monday, up to three children under the age of 15 accompanied by at least one adult can travel free.

➜ **To book, visit https://gwsr.vticket.co.uk/section.php/330/1/cotswold-festival-of-steam**

Steamy Strathaven marks 77th anniversary

SCOTLAND'S oldest miniature railway is going steamy on Thursday, May 14 to mark the 77th anniversary of its opening on the same day in 1949.

The Strathaven Miniature Railway is inviting owners of locomotives running on 7 ¼, 5 and 3 ½in gauges, to join in the celebrations. "All we ask is that you have valid certification and we'll be delighted to see you," said SMR secretary Ian Samson. "When we celebrated our 75th anniversary on May 14, 2024, we had 16 visiting engines, so we'd like to exceed that number, if possible. And, just to be clear, we do welcome steam, diesel and electric locomotives equally. We have all three types on our own seven-strong, loco roster so don't be shy. If you're not a steam owner, you'll still be very welcome indeed!

"We already have locomotives and their owners joining us from Newcastle and Lancaster, so distance is no object."

Meanwhile, the SMR has broken new ground by producing seven badges, each depicting one of its locomotives, ranging from 2-6-0 *Margaret* the line's stalwart first locomotive in service, since hauling the first train in 1949 right through to modern electric traction in the shape of *Neptune*. The badges will be on sale during the operating season, which runs at weekends from now up until the end of September.

"We thought that the locomotive badges would be an ideal souvenir of the line, especially for children. We are selling them at £1 each, or £5 for all seven, and they are also available plus postage, directly from us.

Steam stalwart *Margaret* (below) and electric locomotive *Neptune* (above) feature on the new badges. SMR

"If anyone would like a badge or would like to let us know they are planning to come along to our steam up on May 14, just drop us an email at strathavenminiaturerailway@gmail.com"

Steam loco owners and their steeds came from near and far for the SMR's 75th anniversary in 2025. They will be welcome again on May 14. HUGH DOUGHERTY

Bridge repairs completed in time for start of Wensleydale season

By Robin Jones

THE Wensleydale Railway completed essential repairs to its stone overbridge at Stoop House Farm, near Leyburn, in time for its new operating season to begin on February 14.

The bridge carries the railway over a country road serving neighbouring farms and villages and had suffered water ingress into the masonry over the years, requiring urgent attention.

Vegetation needed to be cleared from around the site and sections of track lifted and ballast cleared to allow access to the top of the bridge deck. Some masonry repairs were completed by volunteers before a specialist contractor installed a waterproof membrane on the deck.

The project was led by retired civil engineer Graham Boyd, who has volunteered at the railway since 2025. He said: "This project took five weeks to complete and involved volunteers from our vegetation, direct works and permanent way teams, as well as operations and office staff. Much of the work was done in very poor weather. I would like to thank everyone involved in successfully completing this work".

Marketing and fundraising manager Nick Keegan said: "There's no shortage of ongoing maintenance work required to keep our railway in top condition. Many hands make light work, and we would welcome the public's support."

For more details about volunteering on the line, email volunteercoordinator@wensleydalerailway.com, visit wensleydale-railway.co.uk or telephone 01677 425805.

Training ground and testbed

The railway recently hosted testing and development days for County Durham-based arboricultural firm Arbor Division Ltd, which booked a week-long equipment training exercise. The family-run business of professional tree surgeons and arboricultural consultants used the railway to test its new 'Menzi Muck' road-rail vehicle and carry out staff training. The Swiss-made 545X is a walking 360 excavator that can raise, lower, and steer all four legs independently, allowing it to work on steep ground, rough terrain, and even climb over obstacles with ease. Arbor Division Ltd's model is unique and equipped with specialised rail bogies – the first and only machine of its type in the UK. This machine was provided by Excav8, based in Cumbria, along with a range of buckets, a grapple saw, tree shear, log grab, mulcher and tilt rotator. The rail conversion was manufactured by King Rail in Northampton.

Above: The stone overbridge at Stoop House Farm. BILL BRIGGS/WR

Left: Relaying track over the bridge at Stoop House Farm. DAVID WINPENNY/WR

The training took place on the 5 ½-mile Leyburn to Redmire section, which has been closed to passenger trains since 2020 due to the deteriorating condition of the track and infrastructure. It is currently the focus of fundraising appeals and ongoing works with the aim of restoring passenger services over it by the end of 2027.

Jonathan Wheeler, director at Arbor Division, said: "Our ambition has been to bring the versatility, safety advantages and efficiencies of the 'Menzi Muck' 545X to the UK rail industry, and we're now very close to achieving that. The Wensleydale Railway provided an excellent environment for our team to carry out training and testing, and we are grateful for the opportunity."

The railway then hosted a volunteering and staff development day for members of staff from National Gas Transmission, who joined members of the permanent way team.

Permanent way leader Chris Morrill said: "Three of our volunteers hosted eight volunteers from National Gas Transmission to get a taste of working on the rails.

"Once through the site safety brief, the gang put trolleys on the line and loaded up 10 replacement sleepers to undertake some spot re-sleepering east of the Wensley level crossing gates. After a demonstration of sleeper replacement by our volunteers, the NGT gang soon got into the swing of it."

Jon Trueman, WR director and industry partnership manager, said: "It was our pleasure hosting a volunteering day with members of staff from National Gas Transmission. Their work directly contributed to our project to restore passenger services over the 5 ½-mile section."

The Menzi Muck M545X tested on the Wensleydale Railway. JIM WAREING/WR

Right: National Gas Transmission staff at Wensley are (l-r) Alan Nunn, Matt Trow, Ben Finney, Chris Godwin, Mark Pearson, Darren McKenna, Connor Simpson and Steven Porter. CHRIS MORRILL

➜ The railway is to hold a home fleet diesel gala at Leeming Bar station on the May 23-25 Spring bank holiday.

Severn Valley hosts major emergency exercise

THE Severn Valley Railway hosted emergency services teams as they played out Exercise Saber, a full-scale simulated emergency, on March 12 in order to stay as prepared as possible to maintain public safety.

Passengers and residents close to Kidderminster Town station witnessed a major response in the pre-planned scenario of a train crash.

The exercise also involved Network Rail, West Mercia Police, British Transport Police, West Midlands Ambulance Service, both Hereford & Worcester and Shropshire fire and rescue services, the SVR and West Midlands Railway, plus 200 volunteers playing passengers and other members of the public.

It simulated the collision of a hydrogen train, provided by Vanguard STS, and a diesel train.

Network Rail Central operations director Martin Colmey said: "Safety is at the heart of everything we do, and these training exercises are vital to ensuring we can act quickly and effectively in a real-life emergency.

"I would like to thank all partners involved for their support with this incident and their work in making the day a success.

"Special thanks go to the SVR. Holding the event at a heritage railway meant we could carry out an important exercise in a live railway environment on a day they're closed, and therefore not have to impact mainline trains and passengers."

SVR managing director Gus Dunster added: "The SVR has been pleased to support Network Rail in providing a location for this large-scale emergency response exercise.

"We facilitated an authentic railway environment with two sets of locomotives and carriages in the vicinity of Kidderminster Town station so that the exercise could take place without impacting on the operational main line.

Multi-agency emergency services incident response training at Kidderminster Town station. SVR

"Exercise Saber was timed to take place when the SVR was not operating public services.

"For more than two years, we've had a partnership agreement with NR, and this is another excellent example of that close collaboration."

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Ivatt 2-6-0s Nos. 46464 and 46512 in the 1898-built Highland Railway steam shed at Aviemore on the Strathspey Railway during an In Search of Steam photographic charter on February 28. Although currently undergoing maintenance, No. 46512 looked the part thanks to the use of a smoke machine and oily rags. CHRIS GEE

New museum tours will explore 'lost' Underground

By Robin Jones

LONDON Transport Museum has released tickets for its latest series of Hidden London exclusive guided tours running from April to the end of September.

Closed-off locations that will feature in the tours for guests aged 10 and above and running behind the scenes of the Tube network to explore the city's history include disused stations, time-capsule corridors, closed platforms, filming locations and wartime shelters.

Aldwych: The End of the Line will visit a Tube station closed to the public more than 30 years ago and explore its turn-of-the-century ticket hall, lifts, and platforms, explaining the key roles it has played from beoing a wartime shelter to a TV and film location. It will run on selected Wednesdays to Sundays in April, July and August.

On the Baker Street: The World's First Underground tour, visitors will hear what the first Victorian passengers thought of underground travel and explore closed-off parts including original platforms and corridors, some last accessed by the public more than 75 years ago. It will run on selected Wednesdays to Sundays in April, May, June, July, August and September.

Charing Cross: Behind the Silver Screen will explore the disused Jubilee Line platforms, corridors and concourse which closed to the public more than 25 years ago, outlining their roles as film locations, having starred in productions including Skyfall (2012), Paddington Bear (2013), and TV's Killing Eve (2019) and A Spy Among Friends (2022), and walk the secret tunnels beneath Trafalgar Square with a unique view on the Northern line platforms and trains. It will run on selected Wednesdays to Sundays in April and June, and on Friday and Sundays. Guests may combine their visit with afternoon tea at beautiful The Clermont, one of London's greatest railway hotels.

Wartime relics

The Clapham South: Subterranean Shelter tour will follow a guide portraying a 1940s ARP warden in the footsteps of a wartime South London family spending their first night in one of the eight deep-level shelters hidden beneath the streets, with more than a mile of corridors. Visitors will be able to handle genuine Second World War torches, visit an Anderson shelter, and sit on the original bunk beds turned benches that families spent their evenings on during air raids. It will run from Wednesdays to Sundays during the May half-term, summer holidays, and selected weekends in the year.

In Dover Street: Alight Here for Green Park, visitors will discover a secret former station hidden within Green Park station, with passageways and lift landings closed to passengers for decades, on selected Wednesdays to Sundays in April, May, June and July.

Euston: The Lost Tunnels will retrace a century of transport innovation and explore time capsules not seen by passengers in decades, with a gallery of preserved vintage advertising poster fragments concealed for more than 50 years and the iconic Leslie Green station, while uncovering secret views of the Northern Line, on selected Wednesdays to Sundays in May, June and July.

Moorgate: Metropolitan Maze will tour a maze of disused spaces left behind by nearly 160 years of redesigns and station upgrades, with disused tracks, original passenger corridors complete with vintage tiles and posters, and ingenious repurposes in response to the needs of the growing capital on selected Wednesdays to Sundays in April, July and September.

Piccadilly Circus: The Heart of London uncovers the original station's beautiful Edwardian design in tunnels last seen by the travelling public in 1929 and explains how 1920s modernisation works defined the iconic look of Underground stations today. It will run on selected Wednesdays to Sundays in May and September.

Secrets of Central London is a walking tour in which expert guides take participants around theatreland, Covent Garden, Kingsway and the Embankment, revealing little-known facts about the area pulled straight from museum archives. This takes place on selected Saturdays and Sundays until the end of September.

A multitude of long-forgotten spaces will be unveiled during London Transport Museum's latest series of Hidden London expert guide tours. LTM

On sale now

Tickets for the tours are available now at ltmuseum.co.uk/hidden-london and include half-price one-day entry to London Transport Museum (where under-18s go free) within a month of the tour date and a 10% discount on all full-priced products at the museum shops. Profits from the tours are used to fund the museum's charitable work and to share and conserve London's transport.

Now celebrating 200 years of Scotland's first modern railway!

By Robin Jones

A NEW exhibition celebrating the bicentenary of Scotland's first modern railway has opened.

The display at the Auld Kirk Museum in Cowgate, Kirkintilloch, highlights the story of the Monkland & Kirkintilloch Railway which opened in 1826 and ran for 10 miles from collieries in the Monklands to the Forth & Clyde Canal in Kirkintilloch.

Exhibits include significant and rare items from the East Dunbartonshire Archives at the William Patrick Library, Kirkintilloch, including a contemporary drawing of the first Monkland & Kirkintilloch Locomotive and a large contemporary coloured map of the line.

Visitors can also see a range of objects including sections of rail, stone sleeper blocks and an Edmondson ticket dating press with a representation of Monkland Railways tickets.

Never before displayed is a selection of photographs from the 1960s taken by Monkland & Kirkintilloch Railway historian and author Don Martin MBE, while a display from a local model railway society features a range of appropriate models of locomotives and wagons.

East Dunbartonshire Leisure & Culture Trust chairman Alan Wright said: "The bicentenary is a significant milestone, and the trust is proud to be partnering with the National Transport Trust and local groups like the Kirkintilloch & District Society of Antiquaries and the Lenzie Gauge 0 Group to commemorate it.

"I hope this exhibition brings back memories for people whose family lives would have been shaped by the Monkland & Kirkintilloch Railway.

"I hope too that it can ignite interest in a new generation keen to learn about the history of Scottish innovation in transport."

Under an 1824 Act of Parliament, the railway had powers to use steam locomotives. It was the first to introduce the first Glasgow-built steam locomotive in 1831.

The first commercial train on the line was a horse-drawn coal train from Gartsherrie to the Forth & Clyde Canal at Kirkintilloch on May 17, 1826.

It was the first of a group of early North Lanarkshire lines that formed the core of the Scottish railway network. The railway's decline mirrored that of the Monklands iron industry, and a series of closures led to the complete closure of the line north of Gartsherrie in 1982. However, two very short sections survive: the north-south line from Sunnyside Junction to Whifflet and the eastward section from Sunnyside Junction to Greenside Junction, which is now part of the Glasgow-Airdrie line and was electrified in 1960. Other events to mark the bicentenary will include the unveiling of a National Transport Trust Red Wheel at Southbank Marina, a talk on the history of the line by Don Martin MBE, accompanied by the launch by the launch of a book of photographs from the 1960s on April 16 at the Auld Kirk Museum, and a guided walk along the northern part of the line on May 7.

The museum opens from Tuesdays until Saturdays from 10am to 1pm and 2pm to 5pm. Visit www.edlc.co.uk/venues/auld-kirk-museum/

LNER J88 (North British Railway F class) 0-6-0T No. 68336 heads a daily goods train on the Monkland & Kirkintilloch line between Whitegates and Woodilee on March 7, 1960. EAST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL

Global appeal of Didcot steam

MORE than 30 photographers from the United States and Germany descended on Didcot Railway Centre for a Timeline Events charter.

The group had been touring heritage railways in the UK and had a packed schedule.

They arrived at Didcot at lunchtime on February 28 and were there until 9pm, photographing GWR prairie No. 4144 in the brilliant afternoon sunshine and Castle 4-6-0 No. 5051 in atmospheric after-dark shots in the evening.

Four of the visitors, Aleah, Chris, Gabrielle and Pete, even came dressed in 1940s fashion for the occasion.

Above: GWR Castle 4-6-0 No. 5051 *Earl Bathurst* in the evening. FRANK DUMBLETON

Left: Visitors Gabrielle, Chris and Aleah with No. 4144. FRANK DUMBLETON

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Plea to make Belcoo & Blacklion station a railway museum

By Hugh Dougherty

A SINN Fein politician in Northern Ireland has issued a plea for the former Belcoo & Blacklion station to be turned into a community hub and railway museum, celebrating the life and times of the Sligo Leitrim & Northern Counties Railway which connected the station to Enniskillen and Sligo between 1879 and 1957.

Jemma Dolan, Member of the Legislative Assembly for Fermanagh and Tyrone, said that the B1-listed station house, signal cabin, water tower base and platform, currently all up for sale, should be acquired by the council as part of the SL&NCR Greenway project, utilising the 43-mile trackbed between Enniskillen and Sligo. As Ireland's last independent 5ft 3in gauge railway, the SL&NCR holds a special place in the country's railway history.

She said: "The B1-listed station house and signalbox, part of the former SL&NCR, lie within the Cuilcagh Lakelands UNESCO Global Geopark and on the proposed Enniskillen-Sligo Greenway. Local interests and Fermanagh and Omagh District Council and the SL&NCR Greenway project have expressed interest in the site. I have written to the Shared Island Fund to consider supporting its redevelopment and have committed to working with partners to take the project forward."

Left: Belcoo & Blacklion station showing the platform and station house. MCGOVERN ESTATE AGENTS

Right: A drone view of the site showing the restored level crossing gates and signal which are also included in the sale. MCGOVERN ESTATE AGENTS

Time is not on Ms Dolan's side, however, for the station is being marketed by Enniskillen-based McGovern Estate Agents Limited, at offers of more than £225,000. Describing the station sale as a unique opportunity to own a piece of local railway heritage, the estate agent also stresses the uniqueness of the station, situated right on the border, handling customs examinations of passengers and goods on all trains, describing that aspect of the station's history as adding 'an intriguing historical dimension.'

Leitrim County Council is leading the Sligo-Enniskillen Greenway project on a cross-border basis and is sympathetic to Belcoo & Blacklion station being retained for community, greenway user and railway heritage museum use. Suggestions for the proposed railway museum have included rehoming some of the SL&NCR items currently displayed in Enniskillen at Headhunters Barber Shop and Museum.

In the longer term, it has been suggested that either or both of the only two existing examples of SL&NCR rolling stock could even make their way 'home' to the site.

Preserved but unrestored by the Railway Preservation Society at Whitehead is SL&NCR 0-6-4T *Lough Erne,* built in 1949 by Beyer Peacock, and it famously remained the property of the builder as the railway could not meet the build and delivery costs, with a bunker plaque noting the hire-purchase arrangement in operation. The locomotive and its sister, *Lough Melvin,* were bought by the Ulster Transport Authority for shunting duties after the SL&NCR closed. The other SL&NCR survivor is railcar B, built as an articulated unit by Walker Bros of Wigan in 1947, and bought by Coras Iompair Eireann after the SL&NCR closed in 1957. The unit is currently stored in the open at the Downpatrick & County Down Railway and is in poor condition.

Supporters of the museum project claim that the two survivors are unlikely to be restored at their current bases and that a move to Fermanagh could be of benefit for the longer-term future, but that would depend on the success of the drive to acquire the station building for community and railway heritage use.

Left: Unrestored Railcar B stored in the open at Downpatrick. D&CDR

Right: *Lough Erne* is currently stored at Whitehead with no long-term plans to restore it. RPSI

Alan Keef restructuring closes workshops in focus shift to trackwork – but engineering rehomed thanks to new West Yorkshire partnership

By Robin Jones

AFTER more than 50 years as one of the UK's leading narrow gauge railway engineering companies and locomotive builders, Alan Keef Ltd has announced a major strategic shift in its business direction to focus on the key areas of trackwork and consultancy services.

The move marks an important step in the evolution of the business and with the establishment of a new manufacturing partnership will ensure that all of its customers' future needs are met.

Managing director Patrick Keef said: "We are proud to have been the 'go to' name for narrow gauge engineering for so many years. This move is about responding to the changing needs of our market and recognising how we can best ensure we meet those needs.

"Our track division is, without doubt, a significant and expanding side of our business, and it is my sister and co-director, Alice Basey, who has overseen much of the growth of this work in recent years and we firmly expect this growth to continue.

Time to retire

"In planning my retirement and wishing to gradually step back from the day-to-day running of the business, we have taken the decision that the right direction for us is to focus on this expanding trackwork division alongside the existing strong consultancy side of the business.

"Manufacturing has always been an important and, in many respects, the most visible part of what we do, and we are immensely proud of the reputation we have for quality manufacturing. At the same time, we have recognised the emerging technology that is increasingly what our customers envisage for their railways in the future.

"We are therefore immensely pleased to announce that we have established an exciting new partnership with West Yorkshire-based The Steam Workshop, with which we have built an excellent relationship, and which will pick up the mantle of Alan Keef Ltd's manufacturing going forward. I believe this is nothing but a positive move for our customers.

"The Steam Workshop is building a solid reputation for its dynamic approach to product development, sound engineering and manufacturing, specifically with regards to e-locomotive technology, and it is well-placed to build on this with our new partnership. I will be working in conjunction with it over the coming 18-24 months to ensure a smooth transition for both parties.

"To support this change, Alan Keef Ltd will implement staff changes that unfortunately include a reduction in roles across our manufacturing business. The decision that we needed to reduce our workforce has, of course, not been made lightly, but our priority is to build a sustainable way forward that builds on everything we have achieved over the last 53 years."

New opportunity

Simon Hudson, managing director of The Steam Workshop, said: "This is an exciting period of expansion for us and perfectly aligns with the continuing growth and evolution of our business.

"We have increasingly found ourselves positioned alongside Alan Keef Ltd in the marketplace, so bringing our collective manufacturing and servicing work together feels a very natural progression. We are immensely privileged to be taking the Alan Keef Ltd engineering legacy forward for what we hope will be another 50 years."

'ADAPT TO SURVIVE' (AND TAKE CARE OF YOUR ASSETS)

A visit to the East Lancashire Railway saw **Owen Hayward** sit down with its general manager Lee Kenny to discuss the railway's past, present, and future.

Standing on the platform at Bury Bolton Street on a rather cold and damp day in February, it is reassuring to see it is busy – despite being between service train departures. The station café is healthily patroned, while standing at the platform are Kerr Stuart-built Borrows 0-4-0WT D249 *Willy* (visiting for the small engines' gala; see *Heritage Railway* issue 343) and Class 08 No. 13594, which are running a sold-out sequence of driver experience courses towards Burrs Country Park and Roch Viaduct respectively.

Inside the café is where I find Lee, mid-conversation about concrete, of all things. "The station building here dates from the 1950s, and many of the concrete piers need remedial work," he tells me. This is nothing major and won't disrupt operations, but it is one of those care tasks that could become something bigger if it's not kept on top of. It also forms one of the main points for managing a railway: making sure you're keeping up with maintaining the railway's key assets – the infrastructure, rolling stock, stations – which are essential to running a good and safe line.

"We are also about to complete a £1.3-million refurbishment of Higher Woodhill Viaduct on the outskirts of Burrs Country Park, which we got community ownership funding towards in December 2023. We are exceedingly grateful for this because this structure has been a burden on the mind for quite a while."

The viaduct was structurally safe, meaning trains have continued to pass over it during the last 12 months, but having not received any major repairs since 1932, attention was well overdue. Since our conversation took place, this hwork as now been completed, and the scaffoling and surrounding worksite dismantled, meaning this pretty spot will become picturesque once more.

Buckley Wells

Maintenance of bridges, tunnels, and other structures is one thing, but a particular drain on the ELR at the moment is the former Buckley Wells carriage shed which now serves as the main locomotive works. Built in 1856 and given Grade II-listed status in 1992, age has more than caught up with this building, yet implementing repairs is not a straightforward affair as it is owned by the local council, from which the railway leases it.

Lee tells me that expenditure on this has been substantial, and continues to be so, but a solution could be on the horizon. "We've put in £100,000 or more annually over the last few years to just keep the building windtight and watertight. Financially, it's a challenge as the local council has advised us it has no money to invest to share the burden of repairs. As a result, we've had to shoulder the burden to keep it usable and safe. What we're working towards now, though, is a first-stage National Lottery Heritage Fund bid to try and get all the surveys done (asbestos, structural, mechanical engineering), with a view to submitting a much-larger bid in the hope of obtaining some much-needed funding to help secure the building long-term.

"With that will come a bigger focus on community and educational engagement, with facilities suited to these incorporated into the plan. I'd like to see something connected to the history of the building, such as stories from those who once worked there under British Rail – the former shed manager, for example, still lives just five minutes away from it. We're not talking about only the steam and diesel eras, of course: the building served as the maintenance depot for the Class 504 EMUs that once ran between Bury and Manchester, so can we get engineers from this time to come and tell their stories too?

"As we work through what it might all look like, we are getting excellent guidance from Ffestiniog & Welsh Highland Railway general manager Paul Lewin and his team who have just completed something similar with Boston Lodge works.

"The ELR's 40th anniversary of running trains between Bury and Ramsbottom is in 2027, so we are currently looking at what we

Having returned to service in 2014, LMS 2-6-0 'Horwich Crab' No. 13065 heads through a frosty Burrs Country Park on January 16, 2016. Two years later this locomotive was withdrawn once more with a several boiler faults and is currently partway through overhaul. MARTYN TATTAM

Hudswell Clarke 0-6-0T No. 680 *Gothenburg*, running in its MSC livery as No. 32, crosses Brooksbottom Viaduct, near Summerseat, on February 22, 2026, during the ELR's incredibly popular small engines gala.

No. 34081 *92 Squadron* heads through Burrs Country Park on March 14, 2025, during Legends of Steam II. It was withdrawn with several firebox issues later in the year and is due to see overhaul commence at Ian Riley's nearby workshops imminently. With a change in motive power demands, the ELR is now looking to have just one large locomotive like this available for service at a time, meaning it will likely rotate with classmate No. 34092 *City of Wells* and the LMS 'Crab.'
KEVIN WHITEHURST

can do to intertwine the celebration with bringing in elements of the locomotive works' story and how it's evolved and changed, as well as the stories from people involved during that time. If we can get photographs to accompany those, people will take them on board – even youngsters. Visual engagement is key these days."

Not just locomotives are on Lee's mind: proposals for a carriage shed are also advancing, although this has had to take a back seat while the existing 1856 building is rightfully prioritised to ensure its survival.

"We still have an aspiration to erect new carriage and storage sheds at the rail depot. That was originally our focus when we started looking at developments across the site, but it had to shift to the locomotive works because we simply cannot keep putting a vast amount of money into a building that is not ours in the first place. Once we have completed that, we'll turn to raising funds for the carriage and storage sheds.

"Originally, the scheme for this was set to be multi-million, but we've got to be realistic now and revise the plan. What I expect will happen is that it will be something we build up gradually, starting with what is achievable with available finances and that fundraising efforts over time will get us to where we need to be."

Undercover storage is an issue facing almost every heritage railway in the sector, and space is often at a premium where it does exist. Many a volunteer and staff member will attest that stock left outdoors is at the mercy of the elements. It can be demoralising – an endless battle to keep on top of an operating fleet while simultaneously trying to overhaul otherwise out-of-use carriages.

"In the long run, having these new facilities will significantly reduce our repair and restoration costs," Lee points out. "We know from experience that if we store stock under cover, we are doing roughly 10 years or more before vehicles need repainting or bodywork repairs. When kept outside, that generally halves. There are huge cost and labour savings to be had by keeping stock under cover, to say nothing of the visitor impression of vehicles resulting from that."

Challenging times

Making that good impression is another prominent thought on Lee's mind. A decline in passenger numbers has been witnessed throughout the sector, and the ELR is no exception. "Last year was challenging for us; in reality, the last three have been, but 2025 more so," Lee admits. "I think the cost of living has really started to take effect now, and we've seen a significant decline in our family market. What would have previously been strong-performing events for this demographic were down by about 11.5%, and that includes Halloween and Santa services, which always did well. Some areas, though, have stayed resilient; events like our Peter Rabbit and Villains and other character days have seen some growth, but overall in 2025, we were about 9000 visitors down on the previous year, even though we were offering a 'kids go free' promotion on our standard running days. That has made things really challenging.

"The cost side continues at a punishingly high rate, and we anticipate that this will continue. For example, coal prices have risen 130% since 2021. Energy costs initially ballooned by 200%, and while prices remain high, they have come down."

Railways such as the ELR, which have a core team of paid staff, will also have been impacted by the likes of increases in national minimum wage, which has risen by 28% over the last four years, as have pension contributions. All this has a huge effect on the base business operating costs. Furthermore, a shift in booking trends is seeing people book much closer to an event than they may have done before.

"There are some positives in all this: our dining train revenue was up 4% on 2024, and despite the 'kids travel free' promotion and decline in footfall, standard fare revenue went up by 15%. What we are proactively looking at is diversifying where we can bring income in from other areas. One initiative last year was to employ two new painters to set up our own in-house painting team, Heritage Painters of the ELR, for which we have been successful in securing external contracts for. We're also doing much more contract work, such as tyre turning and machining in the locomotive works. Where we can do so, we'll implement practices such as these to help us plug the gap in the balance sheet."

As potential visitors become increasingly 'value-aware' of their visit, different events are being trialled to drum up fresh appeal and tap into new audiences. "We've seen

Looking after structures around the railway is one important thing for a railway's management to consider. Thankfully, Roch Viaduct is not one currently in need of any attention, as Hudswell Clarke No. 4002 *Arundel Castle* leads Class 14 D9531 towards Bury Bolton Street on February 22.

Inside Buckley Wells locomotive shed where the ELR's overhauls take place, including those of No. 13065 (frames only, left) and privately-owned Hawthorn Leslie 0-4-0ST works No. 2800 *Met*, built in 1909 (right). A potential bid for grant funding is being explored that will help inject new life into the Grade II-listed building, which currently sees substantial annual investment just to keep it water and wind-tight.

The overhaul of LMS 3F No. 47324 is progressing rapidly in the workshops and could be completed later this year, making a second 'Jinty' available to the ELR for service.

the audience for the 1940sthemed weekend diminish over the last four or five years. Perhaps there's not the same endearing effect, as later generations don't associate themselves with that era.

"What we came up with last year was a new event called Vintage Vibes, a two-day music and fashion extravaganza taking in the 1940s to the 1980s, thus widening public appeal. This was really intended as a taster to gauge appeal and we only hoped it would break even, but actually, we took in revenue almost double what it cost to run. It was exceedingly popular, so we are running that again this year on May 23/24.

"We are also looking at running the first beer festival in several years, which will form part of our September 18/19 diesel gala. There are some new dining products being introduced, too. One of these is an afternoon tea with a murder mystery element, which appears to be selling quite well, so there's obviously an appetite for these additional experiences.

"Also, like many heritage railways, we've recently signed an agreement with Network Rail Northwest whereby we can reuse some of its redundant rail and ballast, which might not be good for 125mph running but is still perfectly up to standard for what we do. There are already signs of positive things coming out of that, and it will aid with our infrastructure maintenance for years to come. It will all help to save on costs. In return, we offer access to NR staff to do lineside training where classroom and track access go hand-in-hand."

Identifying your markets

To an outsider, a heritage railway on the doorstep of a major population like Manchester might seem to be a winning combination, but there is no reason to assume that this will be the case: you still have to be able to appeal to the masses. That includes getting your marketing and offer right, and being aware of the impact that competition might have on your own product.

"We're in an urban location with 2.8 million peope, so we have a much closer captive audience to call on, Greater Manchester being the second largest city in the country and just down the road," Lee points out. "What we are actually finding, though, is that much of our visitor base is coming from Liverpool. We are doing a lot of analysis on postcode data to find out where we can improve and where we are strong, so we can adapt to suit.

"As mentioned, Santa specials in 2025 were down. One of the factors behind this has been increasing competition from branded experiences with no railway presence. As they are new, they have that lure factor and also don't have the inbuilt cost of a running a steam train experience. We have to acknowledge that some of our regular customers were drawn to these new events, despite them being priced much higher than ours. We simply have to up our game and fight to win them back.

"I'm hoping that numbers will rise again this year after people have been out there and tried them, hopefully deciding that our on-board offer is more worthwhile, but we're still looking at more targeted marketing, as well as introducing things like loyalty offers for returning customers.

"We've been running Santa specials for 38 years. They are a good product, with fantastic support of our staff and volunteers, and continue to innovate. We were very proud to launch SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) Santa trains back in 2023, believed to be the first in the UK. The majority of feedback remains overwhelmingly positive; we're not interested in exploring alternatives such as the Polar Express, which can see a commission of 20% or more go out of the railway. We will consider other branded events providing they fit in with our 'family values' approach and that the majority of income can stay within the railway."

Aspinall 0-6-0ST No. 11456 crosses the River Irwell at Strongstry with a Rawtenstall-bound service.

Creating a sustainable railway

Sustainability is a word that comes up a lot and will no doubt remain on the minds of those managing railways for many years to come, but it doesn't mean making sure you're balancing the books by making drastic cuts – you have to ensure those cuts you do make don't have a detrimental effect on the overall business, leaving you worse off as a result.

"We've got to seriously consider our cost base as much as we can and look at making savings where we can, such as reducing the number of suppliers we use," Lee explains.

"The key thing is looking outside of the box – visitors aren't just looking for a ride on a train, There's got to be more to it than that.

"People are coming to us now for more of a day out rather than just a two-hour trip on a railway. We are shifting things towards having something extra on almost every operating day to keep people interested, but you still must be careful to space these out.

Once a resident at the Keighley & Worth Valley Railway, USATC S100 0-6-0T No. 30072 is also undergoing overhaul in the Buckley Wells locomotive shed. Owned by Andy Booth, work is advancing as time allows around other commitments.

The shed at Buckley Wells is home to projects beyond locomotive overhauls and repair: the bogie of a Mk. 1 carriage has been extracted for work while the body is up on jacks (right). Meanwhile, SR Battle of Britain class No. 34081 *92 Squadron* (left) is prepared for its upcoming overhaul.

"One example is our February half-term operations. Whether it has been Wonderland or dinosaurs, we did a children's themed day every day to bring people in. It does generally work well; on a cold, wet February day, passenger numbers might have only been in double digits, but putting on a wizards day, for instance, drew in an extra 250 people which, when you factor in the secondary spend, makes the day profitable.

"Things don't always work out well, though. In 2023, we cut services right back but found it had a noticeable impact on our group booking market. We put services back on during the week last year, which entailed putting two or three extra carriages onto the dining trains. This then meant we could carry both those passengers, as well as the ones coming for a day out, without having to light up two steam locomotives to do the same job. Sundays are predominantly our quietest day on standard running, so during the winter we went to diesel-only operation on those days.

"How that is looking at the moment, though, is not worked out too well; we're just about covering costs, but the numbers we are actually bringing in are still very low. You must try things sometimes to see how they work, and I think this is where we currently are in that regard.

"Last year, we also set up a commercial website, ELR Motion Works, which focuses on filming activities and commercial engineering. The ELR can be used for a variety of purposes such as commissioning new vehicles; we've got dispensation with the ORR to run trains up to 60mph on the Bury-Heywood section of line, so we're in discussions with a firm at the moment which could turn into a lucrative long-term contract. I hope that will come off during 2026, and it would certainly help to keep the wolves away from the door, simultaneously giving us some breathing space while we try to find a more sustainable business model.

"It's quite easy to be reactive to what's happening right in front of you. Sometimes you can be too reactive, and what you do can have completely the wrong effect. It's one thing to say we can run with one idea for cutting costs, but when you look at it from the other side of the fence, you must be aware of how it will affect your overall income.

"Yes, you might end up saving £100,000, but if you still can't earn that back with the resources you are left with elsewhere, then you will end up worse off.

"Careful consideration goes into these things. I know we're not on our own with this and that nearly every other heritage railway is in the same boat. I don't think the economy is going to improve or change for a number of years."

Balanced fleet

Balancing operational costs to meet predicted revenue invariably leads to the question of the locomotive fleet and what this might mean for vehicles based on the ELR, particularly steam locomotives, which are becoming increasingly expensive to overhaul and operate. "We have switched bases recently in terms of our steam requirements; there are only so many days a year where we need to put out an eight-coach train – a handful at most," Lee points out.

"Our focus is shifting away from needing hefty locomotives to manage such loads to smaller ones that can achieve a similar outcome with maybe five or six carriages instead.

"The key thing is looking outside of the box – visitors aren't just looking for a ride on a train. There's got to be more to it than that. People are coming to us now for more of a day out rather than just a two-hour trip on a railway."

A locomotive yet to run in preservation, GWR 7200 2-8-2T No. 7229 is currently stored in the locomotive shed. What the future looks like for this locomotive is unclear, with a vast sum of money required before it can ever turn a wheel under its own power again, but it is at least protected from the harshness of the natural elements in the meantime.

Buckley Wells shed is not only home to a number of steam locomotive overhauls, but also several diesels. Restoration of unique Class 15 D8233 (left) is ongoing with the locomotive recently returned to its overhauled bogies, while on the right, Class 25 No. 25279 sits awaiting its place in the overhaul queue.

Are small locomotives the way to go? Lee Kenny says very possibly, providing they can manage five or six carriage-loads. Lancashire & Yorkshire Railway 'Pug' No. 11243 and Class 23 No. 11456 arrive at Irwell Vale with a service for Rawtenstall. THOMAS WOOLLEY

"Overhauling steam locomotives is not getting any cheaper, and the costs will just continue to rise – that's a fact. We're seeing this with the LMS 'Crab' No. 13065, which was withdrawn from service in 2018 having developed boiler issues after just four years of running. That was looking to be a £70,000-£80,000 job and within six months changed to £400,000. Having had to stop spending on it during Covid-19 to make sure the railway survived, we're talking probably £700,000 still being needed to put it back into service, which is a huge amount of money and will be difficult to find.

"Railways appear to be growing much more realistic about their traction policies and are deciding they don't need to overhaul lots of big locomotives to pull smaller trains; that's not cost-effective. We're looking at retaining the two larger ones we have, namely the 'Crab' and Bulleid No. 34092 *City of Wells*, but we aim to have just one in ticket while we overhaul or repair the other. Basically, we'll keep one in service at any given time to manage those few occasions when we still need to run bigger trains.

"We're very fortunate too that we're well-supported by a number of private owners. LMS 'Jinty' No. 47324 is being restored and will hopefully be running later this year, which will help. Even though it is not owned by the railway, the ELR has sponsored the overhaul, and we have an agreement whereby in return we'll get to use it at no cost to us.

"There's also progress on 'Black Five' No. 45337. We have a very good working partnership with the owning 26B Railway Company.

"Andy Booth has a few locomotives here too, such as L&YR Class 27 No. 52322 and USATC 0-6-0T No. 30072 (perhaps best known for its ochre livery carried at the opening of the Keighley & Worth Valley Railway). The latter is undergoing overhaul in the workshops but has had to take a backseat at times when attention was needed on other locomotives in his collection, meaning that progress has been slow. The bottom end, however, is largely complete, with the boiler the main component needing attention. While he would like to see this completed by the end of 2027, it all comes ashitdown to factors out of his control, but it is progressing nonetheless.

"The same can be said for Class 15 D8233 and Class 28 D5705. They're both still a few years away from completion, but when they are up and running, there will be a lot of interest in them. The recent photoshoot with the Co-Bo was hugely successful, and we might try and do something like that every year to help bring in a bit of money for them both."

A balance must be considered when it comes to a railway relying on its own fleet or that of private owners. The latter removes a financial burden for overhaul costs, though a daily steaming fee is usually paid for their use, but it can leave a line at the mercy of an often high-demand hire market. If a railway does not have a long-term agreement or a healthy working relationship in place, an owner can take their locomotive away, should they feel so inclined.

"I always look at other railways with huge respect and think, 'how do *they* do it?' Some seem to have a vast number of big steam locomotives they can call upon, but that might be because they have the support of societies and trusts.

"The challenge for most railways will be getting into the habit of putting some money aside every time you use your own assets. Treat it like a hire fee and build up a pot of money to be used on something when it is needed."

Eyes on Castleton?

At about 12.5 miles, the ELR is, to many, an ideal length, and it connects two fairly major towns while passing through some unspoilt countryside. Yet talks of an extension have been floating around for a while, with a view to taking operations beyond the current terminus at Heywood to the outskirts of Castleton, which will also be closer to the main line. Council-supported proposals to extend Manchester's tram network (which already serves Bury) here is putting this aspiration in limbo, with the plan leaving ambiguity over whether the ELR would need to look at sharing a line to connect to the same destination.

"We have no certainty whether they will choose to built a separate line or an intergrated one using ELR track. We do not believe the latter is economically or operationally feasible; we just have to wait and see what proposals emerge.

"Whether we actually want to do it depends on a number of factors. If you're bringing people directly from Manchester City to Heywood station, where they can cross onto one of our trains, you have to ask if there is actually a need to go to Castleton. Such an extension, however, is very much an aspiration of Rochdale Borough Council as well as the railway as a whole, as it would give us a direct connection with national rail. Until they decide what they're doing with the trams, it's very difficult for us to look at it seriously at this stage.

"It will be a project that sits in the background waiting, and it's only a distance of a mile or so, so we're not losing out on much at the moment." HR

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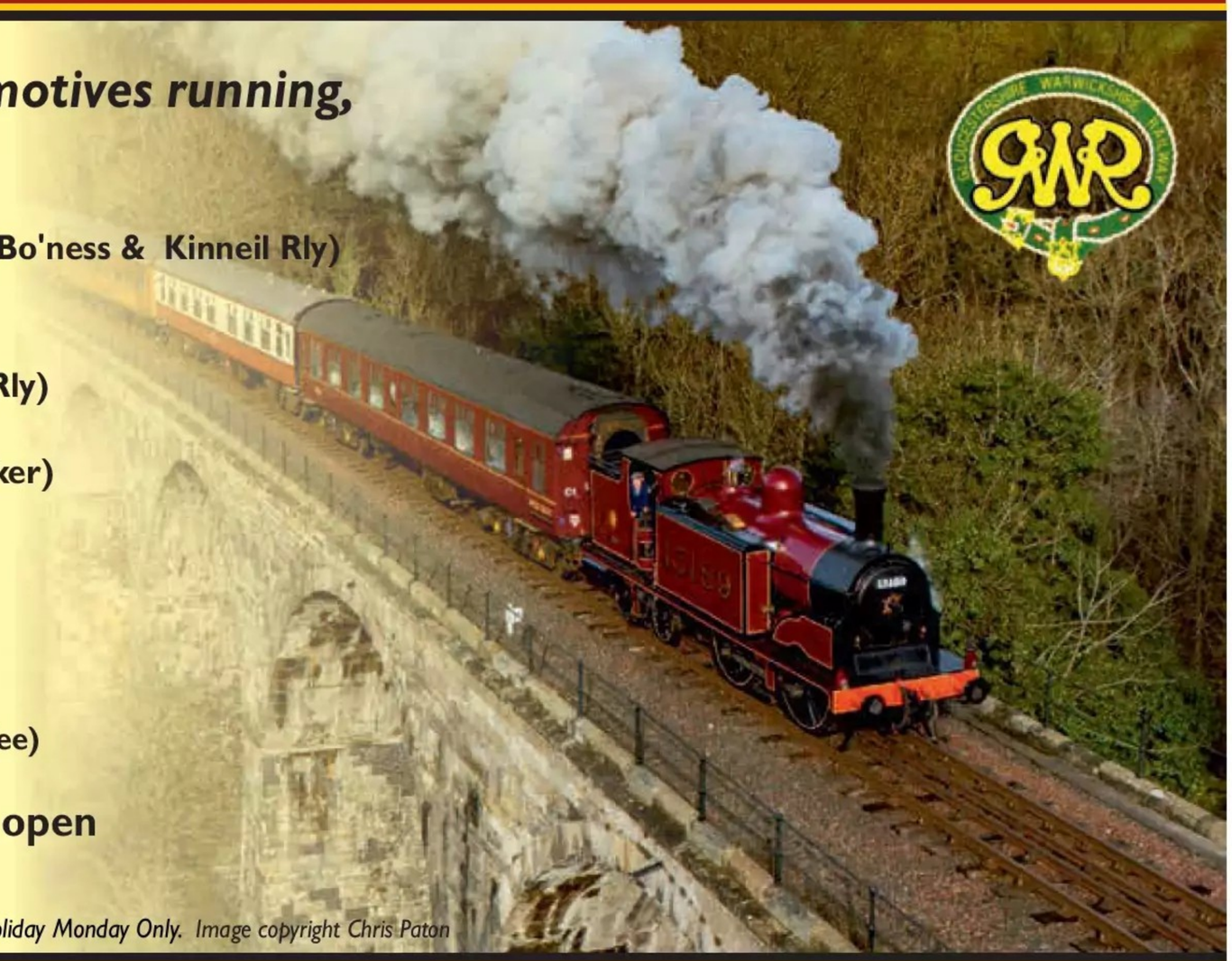

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Framed by a pair of baron trees, BR Standard 2MT 2-6-0 No. 46464, known to many as 'The Carmyllie Pilot' owing to its association with the rural parish in Angus, performs a runpast at Croftnahaven during an In Search of Steam photographic charter on the Strathspey Railway on February 28. CHRIS GEE

Hastings DEMU trip to Bath and Cranmore

By Tim Hobman

ON Saturday, April 11, Hastings Diesels will run its second trip of the 2026 season, to Bath and the East Somerset Railway.

Starting from Hastings as a 10-coach train made up of a six- and a four-coach DEMU, the tour will pick up additional passengers at St Leonards Warrior Square, West St Leonards, Crowhurst, Battle, Etchingham, Tunbridge Wells and Tonbridge.

From there, the tour will head via Godstone to Redhill for a reversal and to pick up more passengers, then take the North Downs Line via Dorking Deepdene to Guildford for another passenger pick-up.

Staying on the North Downs Line and heading northwest via Blackwater and Wokingham, the tour will pick up the Great Western Main Line at Reading, the last opportunity for customers to join.

Bristol-bound

Heading west through Didcot and Swindon, the route will diverge from the Great Western Main Line at Wootton Bassett and take the Badminton Line via Bristol Parkway, turning south via Filton Abbey Wood to Dr Day's Junction. Skirting Bristol city centre, the tour is planned to run via Keynsham to arrive at Bath Spa just after midday. Customers who choose to alight here will have just under five hours to explore Bath or the surrounding area.

Those who decide to stay on board will be taken via Bathampton Junction onto the Wessex Main Line. Passing Bradford-on-Avon, Trowbridge and Westbury, the tour will take the Reading-Taunton Line.

Passing Frome on its avoiding line, the tour is bound for Witham and the East Somerset Railway. Passengers may enjoy a trip along the full line, before alighting at Cranmore for a short break.

After leaving Cranmore, the journey home is expected to be via the same route, picking up passengers at Bath Spa and then setting down at joining stations.

➜ Tickets are available in First-Class and Standard Class. For more details and to book, visit www.hastingsdiesels.co.uk

Spring tours cancelled following 'Hoover' failure

By Owen Hayward

THREE railtours set to be hauled by a Class 50 were cancelled after the locomotive failed at the start of a planned outing to the East Lancashire Railway on March 7, leading to the subsequent tours planned for the 'Hoover' being called off while it is repaired.

The UK Railtours excursion to Bury was scheduled to be headed by Hanson & Hall's No. 50008 *Thunderer* and Class 50 Alliance's No. 50049 *Defiance*, setting out from Watford Junction as planned just before 7am for the journey north. However, upon arrival at Leicester, an undisclosed fault was discovered on *Thunderer* which necessitated its removal from train, it subsequently being shunted into the carriage sidings to await inspection. *Defiance* continued with the tour, with a Class 66 coupled to the rear for the reversal onto the ELR.

Mixed diesel haulage

Having arrived at Heywood station on the heritage line, resident Class 56 No. 56006 was coupled to the front of the 'Shed' and the pair double-headed the train to Rawtenstall at the opposite end of the line. The return to London was once again worked by *Defiance*.

On March 9, Nemesis Rail's Class 31 No. 31128 *Charybdis* was despatched to retrieve the stricken 'Hoover' from Leicester and take it to the firm's workshops at Burton-on-Trent. Although the precise nature of the failure has not been publicly confirmed, it was announced that repairs would take several weeks to complete which, when combined with the lack of available alternative traction, necessitated the cancellation of UKRT's 'South Wales Explorer' scheduled for March 14. This was the second time this particular excursion has faced such a setback, having originally been planned for November 29 last year but cancelled only two days beforehand when the booked assisting locomotive was withdrawn at short notice.

A UKRT statement on March 10 said that the team behind the tour was "profoundly disappointed" about the cancellation, adding: "We have been supported by industry partners not just once, but twice, to deliver this ambitious tour. Many of our valued customers who booked on last year's cancelled tour carried their booking over to this weekend's proposed excursion. To everyone left disappointed and inconvenienced, we apologise wholeheartedly. We will not attempt to re-run this tour and all booked passengers will receive a full refund."

Further setbacks

Just over a week later on March 18, the firm also announced that 'The Not Holyhead' scheduled for April 11 and 'The Gold Medallion' land-cruise for April 9-14 were also affected, *Thunderer* having been booked to work these. "We have been advised that repairs to No. 50008 will not be complete until the summer, and this leaves us with an unacceptable level of doubt that the aforementioned tours can operate reliably and as planned," a statement said. "After much deliberation, the decision to cancel these trains now has been taken to protect both you, our valued customers, and UK Railtours from further last-minute cancellations."

It added that its five-day holiday to the Isle of Man under the name of 'The Manxman,' running from April 9-13, was still going ahead. It will instead be run by GB Railfreight using one of its Class 57s for the journey between King's Cross and Liverpool Lime Street, with the cancelled tours having been slotted into the gap on the UK mainland it left.

"We are very grateful to GBRf for stepping in at this late stage," the statement added.

Avocet undergoes loaded test run

ON Wednesday, March 18, unique Class 89 No. 89001 *Avocet* underwent its first loaded test run in more 25 years, working between Crewe holding sidings and Tebay.

This move followed a previous overnight test on September 29 when the 'Badger' successfully underwent its first main line test between Crewe and Stafford to test all of the locomotive's systems and give crews a valuable hands-on experience of its performance, as reported in *Heritage Railway* issue 338.

For this latest test run, Class 86 No. 86101 *Sir William A Stanier FRS* was attached to the rear for insurance, with the whole consist turned out in a uniform InterCity livery.

The only example of its class to have been built, the AC Locomotive Group has been undertaking the restoration of *Avocet* in partnership with Locomotive Services Group, with which it will be operated on main line tours once completed.

Little and large: On the southbound working of its loaded test run, No. 89001 *Avocet* passes through Warrington Bank Key, where it met its twin – a planter in the shape of the locomotive by Crich-based artist Tom Fletcher.
ZAC HINCHCLIFFE

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Bulleid Merchant Navy Pacific No. 35028 *Clan Line* passes Battersea Power station with Belmond British Pullman's 'The Golden Age of Travel' circular tour from London Victoria on March 13. PAUL LAWRENCE

Branch Line Society 'The Welsh Dragon' double

By Tim Hobman

THE Branch Line Society has announced a tour to Wales in collaboration with the 125 Group and Railadventure on Saturday, May 2, which will be preceded by a positioning move the day before.

The one-way positioning move on Friday, May 1 will involve High Speed Train rolling stock in a 2+7 formation and will be running as a Class 1 train rather than the usual Class 5.

Under the title of 'The North-South Connection' and starting from Manchester Victoria, the train is planned to head to Stockport, Stoke-on-Trent and Nuneaton, picking up passengers at each location. From Nuneaton, the tour will head south on the West Coast Main Line via Northampton and Milton Keynes to Watford Junction, where it will pause to set down passengers.

Skirting the capital

From Watford, the train will run via Wembley and take the spur at Acton Canal Wharf Junction and Acton Wells Junction before heading west on the Great Western Main Line, through Slough and Maidenhead, reaching the final stop of Reading mid-afternoon.

The next day, the main event, titled 'The Welsh Dragon,' will start from Euston.

Making use of the stock from the previous day, the tour will head north on the West Coast Main Line to pick up additional passengers at Watford Junction, Milton Keynes Central and Nuneaton. Continuing north to Crewe, the tour will take the North Wales Main Line via Chester and pass through Shotton, Prestatyn and Colwyn Bay. It is expected to arrive at Llandudno at noon.

Passengers may then alight at Llandudno for a six-hour stop in the resort, where the annual Transport Festival will be in full swing.

For those who decide to stay on board, there is a mini tour to Anglesey, witnessing the return of an HST to Holyhead for the first time in more than 20 years. Heading to Llandudno Junction for a reversal, the train is booked to head west past Conway Castle and via Bangor, and to cross the Britannia Bridge onto Anglesey, arriving at Holyhead for a leg-stretch and a reverse move. Heading back to Llandudno to pick up passengers, the tour is then planned to head home via the same route, with the additional stop of Crewe for passengers to alight if required.

Ticketing options

The BLS has provided the option for passengers on the tour to either travel to Llandudno or Holyhead, but tickets must be booked correctly for either destination. Additionally, there is the opportunity for customers to book from Llandudno to Holyhead only and take advantage of the mini-tour.

Tickets are available in First Class and Standard Class for all three tours. The 125 Group sales stand will also be open on board the train, as well as a buffet.

➜ For more details and to book, visit www.branchline.uk

Double awards win for Vintage Trains

TYSELEY-BASED Vintage Trains has received two significant awards.

As reported in *Heritage Railway* issue 343, the organisation was honoured with the HRA Manisty Award for Excellence at the Heritage Railway Association Awards at Venue Cymru in Llandudno on March 7, which brought together more than 300 people from the UK heritage sector.

VT received the award in recognition of its operation of the replica *Locomotion No. 1*, recreating the historic journey of the Stockton & Darlington Railway 200 years after the original run.

Alongside this national recognition, Vintage Trains was also celebrated closer to home at the West Midlands Tourism Awards, where 'The Shakespeare Express' was awarded silver in the 'Experience of the Year' category. The award recognises the strength of the onboard experience, combining heritage steam travel with a full day out to Stratford-upon-Avon.

VT chairman Michael Whitehouse said: "March has been a hugely proud month for VT. To receive the Manisty Award for Excellence is a real honour. At the same time, to see 'The Shakespeare Express' recognised as one of the region's leading visitor experiences shows the strength of what we offer to our passengers today. Together, these awards capture both sides of what we do, preserving railway heritage and bringing it to life through memorable journeys."

Vintage Trains chairman Michael Whitehouse (second left) receives the silver award in the West Midlands Tourism Awards 'Experience of the Year' category. VT

Loughborough diesel gala jaunt with the 'Merry Men'

By Tim Hobman

UK Railtours is offering the chance to visit the Great Central Railway's Spring Diesel Gala behind a GBRf Class 57/3 or partake in a mini tour involving the Robin Hood Line.

Starting from Basingstoke on Saturday, April 25, 'The Merry Men of Loughborough' will take the Great Western Main Line to the next pick-up point of Reading. Before reaching London, there is another pick-up at Slough, and then the tour takes the North London Line. Passing through Gospel Oak, the tour is bound for the East Coast Main Line at Harringay and the journey north. Stopping at Potters Bar, Stevenage and Peterborough for additional passengers, the train is then planned to head west on the Birmingham-Peterborough Line.

Passing through Stamford, Oakham and Melton Mowbray, the train is expected to pass Syston Junction and then, stopping short of the station, make a reversal at Humberstone Road Junction.

With the rear locomotive, a GBRf Class 66, now in charge, the tour will run along the Midland Main Line as far as Loughborough, where passengers may alight for a short walk to the Great Central Railway. The April 24-26 Spring Diesel Gala is expected to feature Class 55 Deltic D9015 *Tulyar*, making its first passenger run in 35 years, as reported last issue. Passengers will have about six hours to enjoy the gala, for which tickets must be purchased separately.

For travellers not wishing to attend the gala, 'The Robin Hood Mini Tour' will leave Loughborough and run north along the Midland Main Line towards Nottingham, home of the folkloric hero.

At Lenton Junction, and diverting away from the station, the tour will join the Robin Hood Line. Passing through Hucknall and Mansfield, the tour is scheduled to briefly join the Sheffield-Lincoln Line, before taking the South Yorkshire Joint Line via Maltby to Doncaster.

Making a brief stop in Doncaster Decoy Yard, the Class 66 in charge is planned to be exchanged for a classmate. On the move again, the train is scheduled to avoid Doncaster station by taking the curve at Bridge Junction and then run via Swinton to Rotherham.

Taking the line past Beighton Junction and Barrow Hill, the tour is planned to rejoin the Midland Main Line at Chesterfield for a run back to Loughborough past Toton and Trent South Junction.

After collecting passengers who alighted at Loughborough earlier in the day, another reversal at Humberstone Road will allow the Class 57/3 to take over for the journey home. Heading back to the capital via the outward route, the path across North London is expected to see the tour take the Southern route via Staines from Gospel Oak, then head towards Reading. As a result, there will be no passenger set-down at Slough on the return journey. After dropping off passengers at Reading, the tour ends where it began at Basingstoke.

Tickets are available in First Class Non-Dining and Standard Class, with a discount for junior travellers in Standard Class. For more details and to book, visit www.ukrailtours.com

Historic 'box may find its way west

GRADE II-listed Brundall signalbox is awaiting the green light to be moved to County School station at North Elmham.

Network Rail has lodged a proposal for the relocation of the 1883-built GER timber-clad 'box, located on the Wherry Lines linking Norwich with Lowestoft, to the heritage venue, but needs permission from Broadland District Council before going ahead. The 'box would need to be dismantled in two halves for it to be taken by lorry to its new home.

A NR statement submitted with the proposal said: "Network Rail is increasingly concerned about the deteriorating state of the signalbox, the genuine threat of arson, and ongoing vandalism.

"Thus, Network Rail believes that moving it to the heritage railway in Mid-Norfolk is the best option of protecting this piece of infrastructure. Furthermore, the current structure's site is subject to tidal upsurge water egress and possible damage."

A statement released by the Friends of the Mid-Norfolk Railway said that the signalbox will become the main operational one at the site.

"The installation of Brundall's 'box is another important step towards bringing back train services," the statement read.

Brundall 'box was decommissioned in 2020 and may be set for County School station. EVELYN SIMAK/CREATIVE COMMONS

Running 32 minutes late and having been pathed behind the late-running 4M45 Felixstowe-Garston from Northampton to Nuneaton, D9000 *Royal Scots Grey* was finally given its head on the Down main through the reverse curves at Baddesley Bridge, Atherstone, on Saphos Railtours' March 11 7am Euston to Crewe 'Deltic Express.' At Crewe, LNER A4 No. 60007 Sir Nigel Gresley took over for a 'Cumbrian Mountaineer ' return trip to Carlisle, D9000 then taking the tour back to Euston, where it arrived just after midnight. GRAHAM NUTTALL

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Severn Valley repeat visit and Mid-Norfolk added to *Inspiration* tour

RAILWAY 200's popular *Inspiration* exhibition train is to make a return visit to the Severn Valley Railway, and also visit the Mid-Norfolk Railway, as four new stops have been added to its nationwide tour.

The extra dates on the year-long tour include Swansea station on April 26-28, Skegness station on May 8-10, the MNR on May 19-21 and the SVR on May 23-31.

SVR managing director Gus Dunster said: "We are absolutely thrilled to secure a rare second visit from *Inspiration* as it approaches the end of its remarkable journey around the UK. It proved incredibly popular when it launched its nationwide tour here at the Severn Valley Railway last June, and we know there will be huge excitement about its return.

"Its visit this May coincides perfectly with the half-term holiday, offering a fantastic opportunity for families and young people to come to the SVR and experience this inspiring and thought-provoking exhibition train for themselves."

To be located again at Kidderminster Town station, *Inspiration* – which was co-curated with the National Railway Museum and supported by a £250,000 grant from The National Lottery Heritage Fund with Porterbrook funding its distinctive livery – brings together rare artefacts, surprising stories and fascinating facts to show how railways transformed the world during the past two centuries.

Railway 200 programme manager Emma Roberts said: "The wonderful Severn Valley Railway was the first stop on *Inspiration's* tour and we are hugely excited to return.

"Since that visit in June 2025, *Inspiration* has been explored by more than 70,000 people and has travelled the length and breadth of Britain, from the Scottish Highlands to the south coast. We can't wait to welcome visitors aboard in Kidderminster."

Visitors can discover how the railway reshaped towns and cities, revolutionised travel and trade, and even helped standardise time itself. There are hands-on engineering challenges to tackle, interactive displays to explore, and an introduction to some of the more unexpected and lesser-known, careers on today's railways, designed to spark curiosity in the next generation.

Nine out of 10 visitors said that they would recommend *Inspiration* to a friend.

LMS 'Black Five' 4-6-0 No. 45407 *The Lancashire Fusilier* leaves Barmoor Clough Tunnel with the Railway Touring Company's 'Buxton Spa Express' from Preston to Buxton on March 14. JAMES SHUTTLEWORTH

Branch Line Society makes second bid to reach Tytherington Quarry

THE Branch Line Society is to run its 'The Paxman Quarrier' in partnership with national freight operator DC Rail on Sunday, April 26. Following a near-successful attempt last July to reach Tytherington Quarry, the society is making a fresh bid to complete the sought-after journey to the end of the line.

The tour also coincides with the 50th anniversary of the introduction of the Class 56 locomotives.

Leaving Ealing Broadway at 7.50am, a Class 57 will haul the train into Paddington at 8am, where the DC Rail 56 will take over for the main leg of the tour which will take the Great Western Main Line, picking up passenger at Reading, Bristol Parkway and Bristol Temple Meads.

DC Rail aims to provide a second locomotive to assist in the Bristol area, while GB Railfreight will operate the train and supply the Class 57 support locomotive. Rare and unusual track sections to be covered include the Rhubarb Curve, Bristol East Depot, and a pass through Bristol Kingsland Road.

After a short break in Bristol, the tour will head towards Yate before branching off to the quarry, a nationally significant source of limestone, producing about 1.8 million tonnes of aggregate annually.

After reversals near Bristol, the tour will head north via St Philips Marsh depot before continuing through Bromsgrove, avoiding central Birmingham, and rejoining the main line near Water Orton, before continuing east through Nuneaton, Leicester and Peterborough, with an additional set-down at Stevenage, before ending at King's Cross at 10.16pm

For more details, visit www.branchline.uk

Swanage locomotive booked to take the 'Belle' back home

THE Railway Touring Company is to run a trip from London to Swanage on Wednesday, May 20.

'The Swanage Belle' will start from London Victoria behind West Country light Pacific No. 34028 *Eddystone*, crossing the River Thames at Battersea before turning west and running over the river again via the Grade II-listed bridge at Barnes to the first passenger pick-up at Brentford.

Passing through Feltham, the train will stop at Staines for more passengers. Crossing the Thames for the third time, it will take the South Western Main Line at Byfleet Junction for the next passenger pick-up at Woking. Following a water stop at Winchfield, the final passenger pick-up point will be Basingstoke.

From Worting Junction, the tour will run via Winchester to Southampton and then along the South West Main Line via Bournemouth and Poole to Wareham. At Wareham, the train is expected to take the reopened link from Worgret Junction to Norden and on to the Swanage Railway to head to Swanage.

Passengers will then have just under three hours to explore the resort before the return journey to London.

Leaving Swanage diesel-hauled, the tour will retrace the route back to Wareham and on via Bournemouth to Southampton. At Southampton, the diesel locomotive is planned to be exchanged for steam before taking the Wessex Main Line via Romsey and Dean to just outside Salisbury. Diverting onto the West of England Line at Laverstock North Junction, the tour will run via Andover to Basingstoke for the first passenger stop, also setting down passengers at Woking, Staines, Brentford and Clapham Junction, before arrival at Victoria.

Tickets are available in Premier Dining, First Class and Standard Class, with a discount for junior travellers and family bookings on this tour. For more details and to book, visit www.railwaytouring.net

Historic Glasgow Central is saved by heroic firefighters

By Hugh Dougherty

THANKS to the effort of 200 members of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, historic Glasgow Central – home to a rich display of Caledonian Railway heritage – was spared from damage after an adjoining building was gutted by fire on Sunday, March 8.

Also surviving the inferno, which took three days to fully extinguish, were the adjacent Caledonian Chambers of 1903, built by the Caledonian Railway as offices, and the Voco Grand Central Hotel, dating from 1903.

The fire broke out in a vape shop in the 1857-built Union Corner building on the corner of Gordon Street and Union Street and rapidly took hold, destroying the interior of the three-storey structure.

At its height, 18 fire service vehicles, including three high-reach pumps, were deployed to tackle the blaze, which was so intense that water had to be drawn from the River Clyde.

Firefighters continued to deal with hot spots three days after the blaze. Caledonian Chambers is to the left of the gap site, with part of the station roof visible through the remains of the Union Corner building's windows. HUGH DOUGHERTY

History at risk

It was feared that the intensity of the flames would damage the steel and glass roof of Central Station, its interior, its famous clock, CR-built wooden concourse buildings, and the Caledonian Railway War Memorial, as well the station's historic gates and the ornate cast-iron veranda on Gordon Street. However, SRFS commanders decided to concentrate on preventing the fire reaching Central station. They sacrificed the Union Corner building, which was reduced to a façade on Gordon Street, to save the station and adjoining railway buildings. Glasgow City Council leader Coun Susan Aitken described the efforts of the fire service personnel as "heroic."

Network Rail engineers had to wait for three days to gain access to the station, but were both relieved and delighted to report that there was no major damage. The council proceeded to demolish the remains of the fire-ravaged building, and the Glasgow Central high-level station was closed entirely to all trains, with the low-level platforms reopening only on March 11. The closure was the longest in the history of the station, which was opened in 1879 and extended in 1903. A limited train service on several routes was restored on March 18, with the whole station reopening on March 25.

Network Rail cancelled its popular Glasgow Central station tours but has confirmed that the station undercroft, Victorian platform and museum, all vital parts of the tours, are undamaged. There is no issue, as originally feared, about water damage below the concourse level, and the tours will be restored in due course; details will be posted at glasgowcentraltours.co.uk.

The station's famously ornate station gates, dating from the opening in 1879, were saved from damage. HUGH DOUGHERTY

The Caledonian Railway-built Voco Grand Central Hotel was also saved from the flames, and all guests were evacuated. HUGH DOUGHERTY

Continued praise

Also adding its voice to the praise being heaped on firefighters for saving the station is the Caledonian Railway Association, the enthusiast body which studies the former Scottish 'Premier Line,' runs an archive, and publishes information on the railway.

Chairman John Paton said: "All members of the CRA are well aware of the great importance of Glasgow Central station to the history of Scottish railways and to the city of Glasgow, and as unique piece of railway architecture and engineering.

"With relatively few modifications, it still performs the function for which it was originally designed, serving rail users as Scotland's busiest railway station. For all these reasons, the association members were devastated to hear of the fire which destroyed the adjoining building at the Union Street/Gordon Street Corner.

"As events unfolded, we were very apprehensive that damage to the station would occur.

"At risk was the station itself, and also the hotel and Caledonian Chambers, built in stages by the Caledonian Railway.

"We therefore wish to record our great appreciation for the heroic work of the fire and rescue service in preventing any significant damage to the station and associated railway buildings.

"The association will communicate its appreciation to all members of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service who were involved in fighting the blaze."

Busy routes

Glasgow Central handles 25 million passengers a year on a variety of routes, including the West Coast Main Line, Glasgow suburban, Inverclyde and Ayrshire services, with the closure causing massive disruption for rail passengers and city centre road and pedestrian traffic.

Hopes that part of the facade of the Union Corner building could be saved as the basis of a reconstruction to fit in with the Victorian character of the station were dashed when Glasgow City Council building control engineers determined that there was no alternative other than total demolition on safety grounds.

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Politician backs call for steam tour capacity at new Stranraer station

By Hugh Dougherty

FINLAY Carson MSP, who represents Galloway and West Dumfries in the Scottish Parliament, said that while he backs a proposal for a new Stranraer station, an outcome he has been fighting for since being elected a decade ago, it must be both future-proofed and ambitious, including having the capacity to handle charter trains and steam specials.

The new station would be situated closer to the town than the existing 1894-built former Stranraer Harbour station. It lost its harbour title and status in 2011 after Stena relocated its Belfast ferries to Cairnryan, breaking a historic rail-ferry link going back 150 years. The station still handles 30,000 passengers annually, with regular daily trains to and from Ayr, Kilmarnock and Glasgow, but it has become rundown and isolated from the town centre and bus stands.

The plan for a new station for Stranraer generally went down well locally when Edinburgh-based 7N Architects was commissioned by Network Rail to look into replacing the existing station with something more modern, and it recently unveiled its proposed HUB station concept.

The Conservative MSP told *Heritage Railway*: "The platform layout in the early illustrations of the proposal shows a short single platform. That would severely limit what can run to Stranraer, particularly locomotive-hauled specials such as steam charters and vintage train sets.

"I am clear that the new station should be designed so these services can continue to operate.

"Heritage and charter trains do more than provide nostalgia. They bring visitors, support the local economy, and help showcase the Stranraer line's scenic potential. Preventing them from accessing Stranraer would be a backward step."

However, Mr Carson stressed he believes that this lack of access is not inevitable, having been encouraged during a recent meeting with Network Rail.

"I raised questions on this subject and am confident that Network Rail is on the same page as I am with regards to future expansion with a tourism and heritage focus.

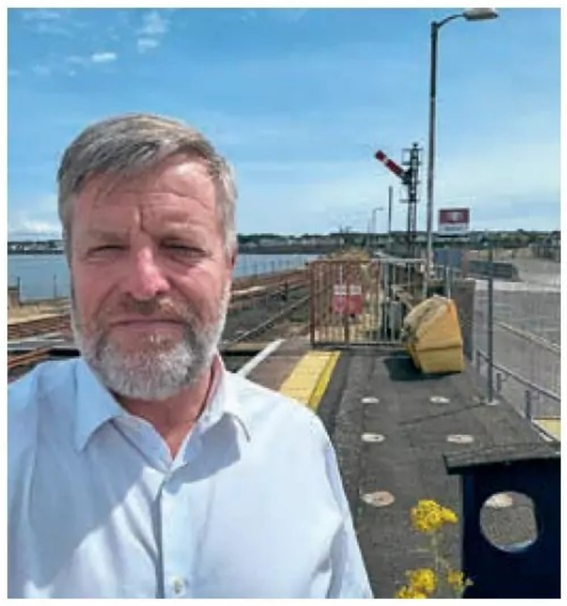
"I would also want Transport Scotland and its partners to consider freight more seriously, and that a more flexible layout than what's being proposed initially would open opportunities for freight, such as timber and aggregates.

"Also, if the railway were to be extended to the Irish ferry port at Cairnryan, using the trackbed of the former Cairnryan Military Railway, a direct rail link for both passengers and freight would be re-established to the ferries.

"The Stranraer line is an under-used asset and all of the above traffic, along with heritage and charter trains, would underpin an ambitious future for it."

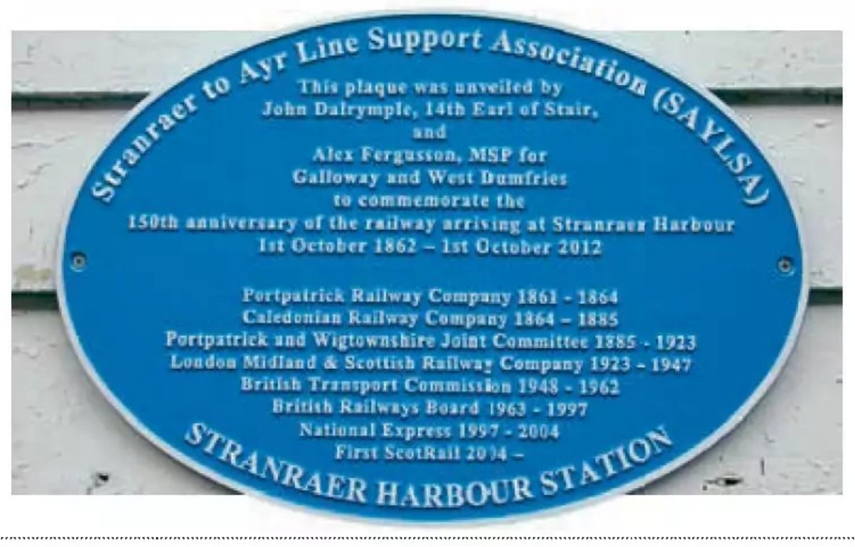
The rail-campaigning MSP also believes that if the new station is built, the existing historic harbour station building should not be abandoned or demolished: "Ideally, it should be repurposed in a way that benefits the town, whether as a community space, a heritage-based facility, a commercial venture or a combined approach. There is no reason why it cannot continue to play a meaningful part in Stranraer's waterfront and railway story."

LMS 'Black Five' No. 44871 takes the return 'Great Britain VII' out of Stranraer, tender first, on April 30, 2014. The new station proposal sites it immediately to the left of the train here. HUGH DOUGHERTY



Finlay Carson at Stranraer station: The MSP wants to see steam and heritage charter trains accommodated at the proposed new station. FINLAY CARSON MSP

MSP Finlay Carson proposes that the original harbour station would be repurposed as a part of the former ferry port's railway heritage, rather than being abandoned or demolished if and when the new station is built. HUGH DOUGHERTY



Left: This Stranraer to Ayr Line Support Association plaque is displayed on the inner wall of the existing station, showing the heritage of the line and building. HUGH DOUGHERTY

Double Scottish railtour days behind 'Whistler' and 'Tractor'

By Tim Hobman

THE Scottish Railway Preservation Society is to run two separate railtours on consecutive days – Saturday, July 25 and Sunday, July 26.

The first tour, 'The Yorvik Discovery,' will give the opportunity to visit either York or Scarborough. Starting from Dundee behind Class 40 No. 40013 *Andania* in the society's restored Mk. 1 coaches, the tour will head south across the Tay Bridge on the Edinburgh-Dundee line, picking up at Cupar, followed by Kirkcaldy and Inverkeithing.

Passing through North Queensferry, the train will cross the Forth Rail Bridge and then run via Dalmeny and Haymarket to Edinburgh Waverley for more passengers. Taking the East Coast Main Line for the final passenger pick-up at Dunbar, the journey south will pass through Berwick-upon-Tweed and arrive in York just after midday. Passengers who choose to alight at York will have just under four hours to explore the city.

Following a reversal of direction, Class 37 No. 37025 *Inverness TMD* will take the tour on to Scarborough. Running slightly north, the route is planned to turn off the ECML and on to the York-Scarborough Line. Heading via Malton and Seamer, the tour will give the remaining passengers about two hours at the seaside resort.

The return trip is planned via a slightly different route. After leaving Scarborough and picking up passengers at York, the tour take a circular route to the south of York via Pontefract Monkhill, Cutsyke, Castleford and Milford Junction, before retracing the route north along the ECML back to Edinburgh and then Dundee, dropping off passengers at their joining stations on route.

The next day, 'The Discovery Double' will again start from Dundee in the early afternoon, with the same two locomotives and rolling stock, following the River Tay towards Perth. At Hilton Junction, the tour will head towards Ladybank and then take the Fife Circle line via Glenrothes and Dunfermline City before turning onto the freight-only line via Alloa to the first passenger drop-off at Stirling. Heading south from Stirling, the tour will turn east after Larbert to the final destination of Falkirk Grahamston.

This tour is one-way only, and tickets are available in Standard Class only.

For 'The Yorvik Discovery,' tickets are available in First Class Premier Dining, First Class and Standard Class, with a discount for junior travellers in Standard Class.

For more details and to book, visit www.srpsrailtours.co.uk

April

11 East Somerset Railway Excursion
Hastings, Cranmore, and return.
DEMU: 1001. HD

11 'The Not Holyhead' ('The Gold Medallion' Day 3)
Derby, Blaenau Ffestiniog, Bangor, Basford Hall, Derby.
Locos: 50008 *Thunderer* + Class 50 TBC. UKRT

11 'The Cathedrals Express'
Birmingham New Street, Newcastle, and return. Steam-hauled throughout.
Loco: 5043 *Earl of Mount Edgcumbe*. VT

13 'The Gold Medallion' Day 5
Rare tracks route from Derby to King's Cross.
Locos: 50008 *Thunderer* + Class 50 TBC. UKRT

14 'The Gold Medallion' Day 6
Watford Junction to Derby only.
Locos: 50008 *Thunderer* + Class 50 TBC. UKRT

15 'The Sussex Belle'
London Victoria, Eastbourne, and return. Diesel-hauled from Eastbourne to Hastings (return).
Loco: 'Black Five' TBC; WCR Southall. RTC

15 Bath Excursion
Ipswich, Bath Spa, and return. Steam-hauled between West London and Bath Spa.
Loco: 70000 *Britannia*. SD

17 'The Golden Age of Travel'
Circular tour of Kent from London Victoria.
Loco: 35028 *Clan Line*. BEL

17 'The Cambrian Coast Express'
Widney Manor, Pwllheli, and return.
Locos: 37240 + Class 97 TBC. VT

18 'The Great Britain XVIII' Day 1
Paddington to Penzance.
Loco: 34028 *Eddystone*. RTC

19 'The Great Britain XVIII' Day 2
Penzance to Chester.
Loco: 34028 *Eddystone*. RTC

20 'The Great Britain XVIII' Day 3
Chester to Carlisle.
Loco: 'Black Five' TBC. RTC

21 'The Great Britain XVIII' Day 4
Carlisle to Fort William.
Loco: 'Black Five' TBC. RTC

22 'The Great Britain XVIII' Day 5
Fort William, Mallaig, and return.
Loco: 'Black Five' TBC. RTC

22 'The Golden Arrow'
Peterborough, Canterbury West, and return. Steam-hauled between West London and Canterbury West.
Loco: TBA (LSL Southall). ST

23 'The Great Britain XVIII' Day 6
Mallaig to Aberdeen.
Loco: 'Black Five' TBC. RTC

24 'The Great Britain XVIII' Day 7
Aberdeen to Newcastle-upon-Tyne.
Loco: 'Black Five' TBC. RTC

25 Settle & Carlisle Steam Special
Liverpool Lime Street, Carlisle, and return. Steam-hauled between Carnforth (outward) and Preston (return).
Loco: Steam: TBA; WCR Carnforth. NB

25 'The Great Britain XVIII' Day 8
Newcastle-upon-Tyne to Euston.
Loco: 'Black Five' TBC. RTC

25 'The Merry Men of Loughborough'
Basingstoke, Loughborough, and return.
Locos: Class 57 + Class 66 TBC. UKRT

29 'The Welsh Marches Express'
Ulverston, Cardiff, and return. Steam-hauled between Crewe and Cardiff.
Loco: TBA (LSL Crewe). ST

Back in main line action following completion of maintenance, Ian Riley's LMS 'Black Five' No. 45407 *The Lancashire Fusilier* crosses Lydgate Viaduct with the outward journey for Railway Touring Company's 'Buxton Spa Express.' The train had set out from Preston at 7.38am but returned that evening via Stockport and Manchester. ROB BATTY

May

1 'The North-South Connection'
Manchester Victoria to Reading only.
Loco: Class 43 HST TBC. BLS

2 The Golden Age of Travel by Steam
Circular tour of Kent from London Victoria.
Loco: 35028 *Clan Line*. BEL

2 'The Welsh Dragon'
Euston, Llandudno and return.
Loco: Class 43 HST TBC. BLS

2 'The Atlantic Voyager'
Dorridge, Newquay, and return.
Locos: 2x Class 47s TBC. RTC

2 'The Garrison Growlers'
Glenrothes with Thornton, Fort William, and return.
Loco: 37403 *Isle of Mull* + Class 37 TBC. SRPS

2 'English Riviera Express'
Crewe, Kingswear, and return. Steam-hauled between Taunton and Kingswear.
Loco: TBA (LSL Bishops Lydeard). ST

2 'The North Wales Coast Express'
Birmingham New Street, Llandudno, and return. Diesel-hauled Chester-Llandudno only.
Loco: 5043 *Earl of Mount Edgcumbe*. VT

4 'The Positioning Move'
Crewe, Holyhead, and return.
Loco: TBA. IC

4 'The Baywatch Merrymaker'
Holyhead, Scarborough, and return.
Loco: 45118 *The Royal Artilleryman*. IC

9 'The Cumbrian Mountain Express'
Euston, Carlisle, and return. Steam-hauled between Carnforth (outward) and Preston (return).
Loco: Steam: TBA; WCR Carnforth. Electric: 86259 *Les Ross*. RTC

9 'English Riviera Express'
Northampton, Kingswear, and return. Steam-hauled between Taunton and Kingswear.
Loco: 60007 *Sir Nigel Gresley*. ST

9 'The Dorset Coast Explorer'
Derby, Weymouth, and return.
Loco: Class 66 + 2x Class 73s TBC. UKRT

13 'Welsh Marches Express'
Bournemouth, Shrewsbury, and return. Steam-hauled between Bristol Temple Meads and Shrewsbury.
Loco: TBA (LSL). ST

15 Golden Age of Travel by Steam
Circular tour of Kent from London Victoria.
Loco: 35028 *Clan Line*. BEL

16 Bath excursion
Ashford International, Bath, and return. Steam-hauled between West London and Bath.
Loco: 71000 *Duke of Gloucester*. SD

16 'The Edinburgh Flyer'
York, Edinburgh Waverley, and return. Steam-hauled throughout.
Loco: TBA (WCR Carnforth). RTC

16 'The Buxton Spa Express'
Ealing Broadway, Buxton, and return. Steam-hauled between Humberstone Road and Buxton.
Loco: TBA. RTC

17 'The Shakespeare Express'
Birmingham Snow Hill, Stratford-upon-Avon, and return.
Loco: 5043 *Earl of Mount Edgcumbe*. VT

Tour promoters

A1SLT	A1 Steam Locomotive Trust 01325 488215
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BLS	Branch Line Society branchline.uk
HD	Hastings Diesels hastingsdiesels.co.uk
IC	Intercity 0800 038 5364
MP	Midland Pullman midlandpullman.com
NB	Northern Belle northernbelle.co.uk
PNP	PNP Events londonthepolarexpressride.com
RTC	Railway Touring Company 01553 661500
SD	Steam Dreams 01483 209888
SRPS	Scottish Railway Preservation Society 0131 202 1033
SR	Statesman Rail 0345 310 2458
ST	Saphos Trains 0800 038 5320
UKRT	UK Railtours 01438 715050
VT	Vintage Trains 0121 708 4960
WCR	West Coast Railways 0333 996 6720

Regular Tours

Daily AM (+ PM from May 5) 'The Jacobite'
Fort William, Mallaig, and return.
Loco: 'Black Five.' WCR

The information in this list was correct at the time of going to press. We strongly advise you confirm details of a particular trip with the promoter concerned.

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ENTERING A NEW ERA:
THE DIESELS OF THE BLUEBELL RAILWAY

Once known for its exclusive reliance on steam, in recent years the Bluebell Railway has welcomed its first resident diesel locomotives in response to ever-changing commercial requirements. **Owen Hayward** speaks to those who are helping to usher in this new era.

Diesel traction on the Bluebell Railway is not a new concept. In 2006, it hired a Class 08 (initially D3023, which was replaced by No. 13263 in May 2008) to assist with the extension to East Grinstead. For years, this had been worked by steam locomotives such as LSWR B4 0-4-0 No. 96 *Normandy*.

For a long time the railway held the accolade of the only line with a regular steam shunt, but even before *Normandy* was withdrawn that year, the economics of such workings were proving unviable. Valuable working hours risked being lost, wasted waiting for a steam locomotive to be lit up, warmed through, and brought up to working pressure. Even for something comparatively small like the B4, this could take two or three hours. Then, of course, there's disposal at the end of the day; all this time needed to be accounted for in the crews' shifts. The arrival of the 'Gronk' to what had, to date, been a line entirely run by steam divided opinions. There were some who felt it did not belong, while others embraced the change.

Nevertheless, the use of the 'Gronks' undoubtedly proved immensely valuable in completing the extension north of Kingscote.

No. 13263 departed in June 2014, but its value inspired a consortium of the railway's locomotive volunteers to take matters into their own hands, purchasing a Class 09 a year beforehand.

Right: A look at the crank on D4106. The scoring is not immediately visible, but its discovery has meant the invaluable shunting locomotive is currently out of traffic for repairs, meaning progress on the group's Crompton is paused. MIKE HAWKINS

Below: Class 09 D4106 at Sheffield Park during a regular shunt. The value of its addition to the Bluebell's fleet has been immeasurable, be that fulfilling typical shunting turns or acting as a 'Thunderbird' on occasion. JAMES CUMMINS

While it would not be until 2013 that the Bluebell would welcome its first resident diesel locomotive, Mike Hawkins, one of the joint owners of D4106, reveals it came close to acquiring one 26 years ago.

Missed opportunity

"Back in 2000, EWS put up an assets disposal list with some shunters included on that," he explained. "Despite support from some of the volunteers in pursuing acquiring one, at the time, the railway management had no interest in diesel traction, meaning we ended up passing on not only this, but also on several other opportunities that came from these lists in the years afterwards.

"The East Grinstead extension finally showed what an asset a diesel shunting locomotive would be; with steam, you weren't getting to the worksite before 10am each day, whereas with a diesel, you could be there by 8am.

"In 2013, I made contact with other volunteers who, like me, had an interest in acquiring a locomotive we could permanently base on the railway to assist with shunting duties and serve as a 'Thunderbird' for failed steam locomotives. We were aware that Harry Needle had five locomotives for sale, so we went to inspect, and identified that D4106 was an ideal candidate, having recently undergone a top-end overhaul. Six of us came together to raise the money to purchase it, but not before first pitching the idea to the railway board, which looked favourably on it and gave its approval. B350 Limited was formed, and the locomotive's purchase signed."

D4106 arrived at Sheffield Park on April 23, 2013, but much like the arrival of the first 'Gronk' in 2006, its reception was a mixed bag. Some felt that a permanent diesel resident had no place there, and there were a few who reportedly tore up their membership cards in protest. Despite this, the locomotive has remained. "It's become a stalwart across all departments," Mike pointed out. "Our current operations manager loves it for that. Since its arrival, we have undertaken a number of modifications, such as returning the marker lights to their Southern Region positions, but it has largely remained unchanged. The most obvious visual difference is that it now carries BR green instead of the orange HNRC scheme. We were always going to repaint it but couldn't help playing a little joke first before the full job was carried out. After repairing the bonnet roof panels, we painted them into blue and ran it with the orange body for a while – that certainly put a cat among the pigeons. It was only for a short time while we waited for a space to become available undercover." The full BR livery was finally applied in spring 2017.

While an asset to the railway, the addition of D4106 has been a challenge when it comes to sourcing spares from what is an already declining pool of parts. "There's no denying that we were late to the table when we bought the locomotive, but we were fortunate to acquire the last of some of the spares stored at East Midlands Railway's scrapyard at Kingsbury," Mike said. "One saving grace has been the relationship between other private owners and groups at other railways. We actively share resources – if we have something another group needs, then we'll sell to it, knowing that we will be treated in kind when our time comes. We need collaboration like this in order to survive, and it has really made a difference when it comes to keeping our locomotive going."

Restoration of Class 33 'Crompton' D5670 is progressing steadily but has taken a back seat while the B350 Preservation Group focuses on completing repairs to its 'Gronk.' JAMES CUMMINS

To date, work on the 'Crompton' has seen the control desk and cab at one end almost completely stripped and rebuilt. MIKE HAWKINS

The 'Cromptons' were known for having body rot issues, and D6570 has been no exception – particularly after years stored outdoors. Large sections of bodywork have been replaced to date, with more still to be done. MIKE HAWKINS

Expanding the fleet

As the 09 is owned by a separate group to the railway, it understandably commands a modest hire fee for each day it is used. This is reinvested back into the locomotive's care, but the monies from that also helped the group acquire a second locomotive, Class 33 'Crompton' D6570 *Ashford*. In June 2021, the news of its purchase and imminent transfer to the Bluebell Railway made headlines, for while a Class 33 and a 73 had both been hired to assist the 'Gronks' working the extension, this was the first ex-main line diesel locomotive to become resident at Sheffield Park shed. While D4106 can work services if required, the class's top speed of 27.5mph makes it just capable of maintaining the line speed of 25mph, so it is not well-suited to such workings. A member of the first iteration of the Class 33 design, the presence of D6570 means that full diesel services can be scheduled in future, opening up the railway to a new generation of enthusiasts while also providing resilience against short-notice steam locomotive failures.

Delivered new to Hither Green depot in September 1961, the 'Crompton' is not only a fitting choice for the Bluebell owing to the class's predominantly SR allocations, but examples also worked the route to East Grinstead, with D6570 (by then numbered 33052) having been recorded at Dormans in June 1987 during electrification of the route. It was withdrawn in February 1997 and sold to the D6570 Ashford Group the following March, when it moved to the Kent & East Sussex Railway.

Much like the desire to purchase a locomotive for shunting duties, initial discussions about purchasing D6570 began several years before its purchase. "Back in 2019, members of B350 Ltd had a chance conversation that revealed a couple of 'Cromptons' were possibly for sale, so we went to take a look. *Ashford* was by far in the best condition, and conversations with the owning group confirmed it was open to offers, however, circumstances at the time meant we weren't able to take it any further.

"Two years later, another conversation revealed it was still for sale. By that point, we were in a much better place and reopened communications. The owning group was very receptive to this and knew we were serious buyers rather than the sort to mess around so were keen to strike a deal. We went to inspect it again in April 2021 and the rest is history.

"The board was again very supportive of the idea; having seen an increasing number of dry summers posing high fire risk, this came at the right time. It is also a dual-braked locomotive, which will be a huge help when we have visiting main line charters coming in over the connection at East Grinstead."

Into the works

Unlike D4106, upon arrival at the Bluebell, the 'Crompton' did not immediately enter service. While it ran at the KESR and remains mechanically sound, for some years prior to the sale it was stored outdoors at Wittersham Road in need of a number of body repairs. The class was renowned for body rot, particularly around the gutters, and it was no exception for *Ashford*, which was suffering from corroded body panels as a result.

"Fibreglass roof, wooden framing and steel sheets are a terrible combination, so when the locomotive arrived, we instantly decided to get the bodywork up to par before handing it over to enter service," said Mike. "As with any restoration project, as you start taking things apart, more problems reveal themselves. We've ended up repairing the crash pillars at no. 1 cab end and extensively rebuilding one side with new conduit, flooring, and guttering. Both cab control desks have been rebuilt, and the engine cooler groups, which were completely rotten, have been replaced.

"It's taken a long time because there are some jobs we cannot do working outside, and the workshop priority must be the railway's operational fleet and own overhaul projects. It means we have to wait sometimes to get a lengthy space in the dry, but progress to date has been good. We've nearly finished no. 1 end and are in a position where we are ready to put the windows back in."

Unforeseen circumstances

The one thing you can be certain of in railway circles is that the unexpected will always flare up at the most inconvenient moments. Before the glazing could be fitted to the cab of the 'Crompton', D4106 suffered a failure which has meant 'that the group's focus had to transfer to repair that. With reports of low oil pressure, an investigation uncovered white metal in samples taken that was traced to two cracked big-end bearings. When dismantled, it was further revealed that the main crank had become scored as a result. "This is less than ideal, but it could have been much worse," confessed Mike. "After we dismantled the engine and took the cranks out, we inspected both big ends and were relieved to find the failure was only to one of them. That was certainly a kick in the teeth, but that's the nature of preservation.

"We've carried out machining, and the offending crank is now true and within tolerance. Thanks to our strong working relationships, we were able to obtain replacement bearings from the Severn Valley Railway. Once we've checked these to make sure they fit, we can start rebuilding the engine. Hopefully we'll be able to see our 'Gronk' back in service fairly soon, which will then free us up to continue with the Crompton."

Sentinel 4WDH No. 10241, sometimes referred to by volunteers as 'Skippy,' arrived in 2010, long before the 'Gronk' and 'Crompton' became resident. It can normally be found shunting at Horsted Keynes' carriage and wagon works. BEN WETHERALL

Given the amount of time that's elapsed since *Ashford*'s arrival on the Bluebell, Mike said that the group will concentrate on finishing the work which has currently been started in order to get it into service as soon as is practically possible: "We are working our way through the electrical circuits, for which we have a number of components to install. We've invested in new batteries, had all the pressure vessels certified, and the axles have been checked and passed as okay.

"We have tried to do as much as we can in-house to keep costs down. We've always kept reserves, but there's no denying that everything has been expensive and continues to be so. There's only six of us at the core of the group, so we'd really benefit from some financial support from people who would like to see *Ashford* running sooner rather than later. We've got an fundraiser open with a target of £5000 towards the cost of the 09's repairs and finishing off the 33."

When asked about what livery D6570 might emerge in, Mike pointed out this was a question the group is regularly asked. "It's the one thing people always want to know, but we're remaining tight-lipped on the matter for now. That said, I will say it will possibly look quite nice if paired up with D6515 *Lt Jenny Lewis RN* at the Swanage Railway."

To donate to B350 Limited's appeal, visit https://tinyurl.com/bluebell-diesels

Varied fleet

These two are, of course, not the only examples of diesel traction on the railway now. The arrival of 4WDM Rolls-Royce Sentinel No. 10241, affectionately nicknamed 'Skippy,' actually came in 2010, long before the arrival of D4106, having been purchased by the railway's carriage and wagon department for shunting at Horsted Keynes. Aside from a change of livery, it has worked largely in the background, often going unnoticed by visitors as it tends to be hidden out of sight in the yards.

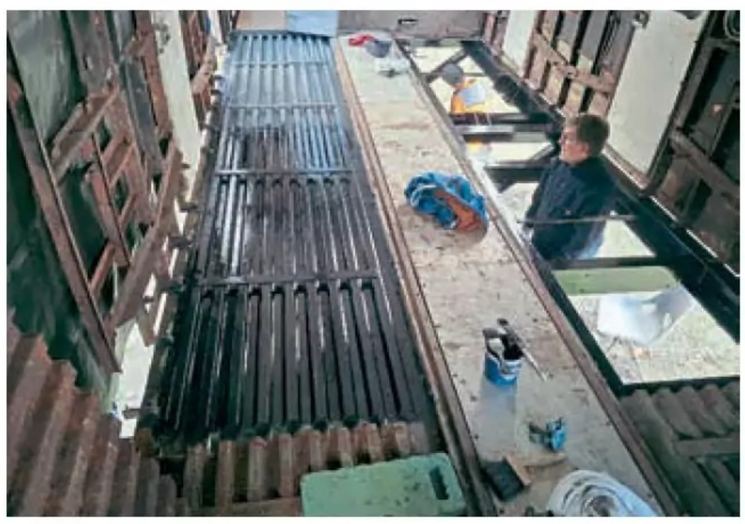
In 2023, a Class 73 electro-diesel was acquired; E6040 entered service in 1966 but following refurbishment in 1990 was aptly named (without ceremony) *The Bluebell Railway*. This was carried until initial withdrawal in 2004, when it faced scrapping, but it was given a reprieve in 2009 when it was sent to the Barry Island Railway. In 2013, it was transferred to Bournemouth Depot for use as a shunting locomotive, moving to Eastleigh for the same purpose in 2017, before finally entering preservation and moving to Sussex. Before departing Eastleigh, it received a body

Class 73 No. 73144 is currently the railway's only operational ex-main line diesel locomotive. It is privately owned and was bought in 2022, arriving the following year after extensive refurbishment. JAMES CUMMINS

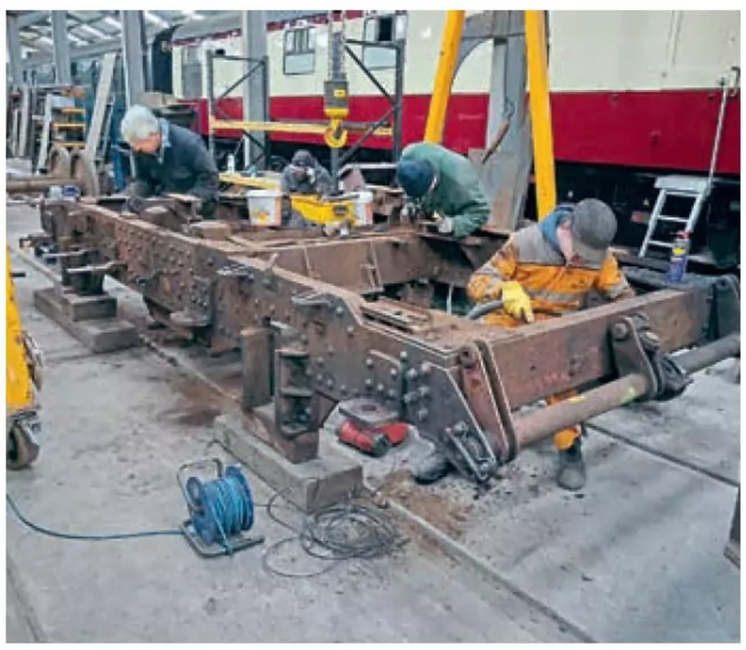
The arrival of Class 207 'Thumper' No. 1305 in 2023 gives the Bluebell Railway even further options for diesel services in the future. JAMES CUMMINS

"We still have much work ahead, and we're not going to put a timescale on when it will be finished. Like every project nowadays, it will be finished when it is finished."

Ahead of the visit of the Railway 200 exhibition train in 2025, one end of Class 207 No. 1305 was smartened up to show the livery that the unit will be turned out in once completed, representing the early 1960s period and fitting in with the rest of the Bluebell Railway's collection. OWEN HAYWARD



The current focus for the 'Thumper' volunteers is the floor and chassis, which once returned to good condition will provide a sound working surface from which to progress other aspects of the DEMU's restoration. BEN WETHERALL



A phased overhaul of the 'Thumper's' bogies has also commenced. BEN WETHERALL

refurbishment and emerged in BR blue with small yellow end panels, although it currently retains modern marker lights at each end.

While nominally operational, a number of issues flared up during E6040's testing which meant it did not work its first public passenger train until September 6, 2024, aided by visiting Class 20 D8188 as part of the railway's diesel gala. It has since settled down into regular use on engineering trains and shunting turns, as well as filling in for failed steam locomotives on the odd occasion. No regular diesel passenger services have yet been scheduled, with the railway committing to steam remaining the backbone of its core operations and diesel traction playing a supporting role.

However, it is recognised that for visitors arriving by national rail to the northern end of the line do not always get presented with the best options in terms of timings, often impacting the perceived value for money. The introduction of an early-morning and late-afternoon service could help to address this; as things currently stand, to put on these extra services would regularly entail the need to lay on an extra steam crew to keep within working hours legislation. With a diesel locomotive available, this would not be the case.

That said, as audience markets shift, firing up an ex-main line locomotive to pull about a full set of carriages from early to late might not always prove viable; this might well be where the Class 207 DEMU comes into play – economical to operate while still offering ample passenger capacity. While none ran over Bluebell metals in BR days, examples of this type of 'Thumper' were known to have served East Grinstead, so the presence of one on the line still delivers a connection to local history and enables the railway to better portray Southern Region scenes once common in the 1960s and 1970s.

No. 1305 was built in 1962, initially as a three-car unit before the centre trailer was ditched during a rebuild in 1991, although an ex-CEP trailer was added in 1995 when the class was allocated to workings between Ashford and Brighton. When withdrawn, it was acquired by the East Lancashire Railway and used there until about 2011, when deteriorating bodywork condition saw it taken out of use and stored. In 2021, it was put up for sale and was purchased by the Coulsdon Old Vehicle & Engineering Society, which moved it to a MOD base in Bicester, where a start was made on its restoration. Unfortunately, the following year, the society was given notice to quit the site, which saw No. 1305 sold to the Bluebell in January 2023.

Ongoing project

Unlike the 'Gronk,' 'Crompton' and the electro-diesel, the 'Thumper' is owned by the Bluebell outright. News of its acquisition was met with some concern over resources, however, much like the Bluebell Railway Goods Division (a group of volunteers focused on maintaining the extensive collection of freight vehicles the railway owns), work on No. 1305 is being progressed by its own volunteer group, led by Ben Wetherall.

"We saw an opportunity when the unit became available and pitched the idea to the board," he recalled. "Thankfully, that potential was acknowledged and the okay was given for its purchase. I think the plan to ensure that its restoration didn't detract from other railway projects helped. We went to inspect it at Bicester, which included a test run. We were wary that aside from shuttling up and down the short line COVES had there, the unit hadn't really done much since being withdrawn at the ELR, so we didn't expect much. At first, it seemed that it was living up to those low expectations, but as we ran it up and down, more and more came to life. Mechanically, it is in really good condition, although there is work to do.

"Upon its arrival in Sussex, we ran it up to Horsted Keynes and stabled it in the old goods yard, which is where its restoration is being carried out. While this is outdoors, we always knew this would be the case as there is just no space in the carriage or locomotive works long-term, although we have had periods in the former, including at the end of last year when we took one of the bogies out to start overhauling it.

"We are focusing on one coach at a time, with the floor being the main area of attention on the motor vehicle (the first of the two being worked on). Once we have a stable base to work on, we can focus on everything else above it with ease. The DEMU has been tripped to Sheffield Park and back during its time with us, which has enabled us to work underneath it. Unfortunately, the nature of these works means it can look like not much is happening, but that is far from the case. One example is that there is a section of the body missing on the engine bay, but we can't fix that until we've finished other work first.

"When it arrived, there were some who said it would be left to deteriorate, but I'm pleased to say some of those behind such comments have since changed their mind – and some have even joined the team.

"Whenever you get anything new, one of the first questions is about colour. We've been open from the offset that it will be BR all-over green, so no yellow ends, which fits into the early 1960s feel – the limit of what we are trying to portray on the railway.

"We still have much work ahead, and we're not going to put a timescale on when it will be finished. Like every project nowadays, it will be finished when it is finished. When that day comes, however, I have no doubt that it will be worth it."

As with the Class 08 and 33 restorations, anyone willing to throw support behind the restoration of No. 1305 can do so online via tinyurl.com/Thumper-1305 or by visiting the group's sales stall at Horsted Keynes during some of the Bluebell's big event weekends. HR

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GWRA salutes stand-out plate

A WEEK after Great Central Railwayana posted a near £20,000 for a steam nameplate, as reported in this column, GW Railwayana reinforced the strength of the upper end of the market at its March 14/15 auction by selling four plates for five-figure sums.

Top of this selection at £15,500 was *The Suffolk Regiment* with regimental crest from LNER B17 No. 61645, while the runner-up was an Irish participant, 4-4-0 *Chichester Castle* and matching cabside numberplate from Northern Counties Committee U2 class No. 78 (£12,500). Third place went to *King Richard III* from GWR No. 6015 for £12,000, with one of its cabside numberplates and the smokebox plate selling immediately after for £2500 and £2200 respectively. Completing the £10k line-up was a GWR name and numberplate 'combine' from Bulldog No. 3340 *Camel* – named after the river in Cornwall, incidentally, not the animal – which went for £10,000.

An old-timer then stepped up to the mark, *Courier* from LNWR Improved Precedent No. 866/LMS No. 5057 (£6500), shadowed by *Wilson Worsdell* from Peppercorn A1 Pacific No. 60127 (£5600) and, at £5000 each, *Upton Castle* (GWR No. 5093) and *The Ranger 12th London Regt*. (LMS Royal Scot No. 46165), while *Sir Harry le Fise Lake* from SR King Arthur No. 30803 wasn't far adrift at £4800.

A cluster of plates brought the category to a close, at between £4000 down to £2000. Pride of place was claimed by LNER A3 No. 60075 *St. Frusquin* (£4000), a tad ahead of *Eland* from LNER B1 No. 61001 (£3800) and *Nannerth Grange* from GWR No. 6826 (£3700), while rounding off proceedings were LNER B17 trio *Raby Castle* (£2900), *Raynham Hall* (£2600) and *Elveden* (£2500), from Nos. 61625, 61611 and 61604, and *Norcliffe Hall* from GWR No. 6957, which went under the hammer for £2000. The sole nameplate non-seller was *Sweeney Hall* (GWR No. 4973), although this went post-sale for £2600, and justifying a mention was a Devon county crest from an unidentified SR West Country class Pacific, fetching £5800.

Heritage modern traction ensured it wasn't ignored, with *Western Lord* and matching cabside numberplate from Class 52 D1047 being in the vanguard thanks to its £12,000 realisation, behind which came *Victorious* (Class 42 'Warship' D860) at £9400 and *Selhurst* from Class 73 electro-diesel E6022 (£2500), although *The Royal Marines* from Class 45 D70 was a non-seller.

Busy day

No. 61001 had a busy day, for in addition to its *Eland* nameplate, the 4-6-0's smokebox numberplate sold for £800 and two of its LNER worksplates – a 9x5 and a fully engraved version – for £750 and £1500 respectively.

On the subject of smokeboxes, the overall winner, with a realisation of £4500, was 61660 from LNER B17 'Footballer' *Hull City* – perhaps the successful bidder was hoping the plate would provide impetus to Hull's push for promotion to the Premier League – while the leading worksplate at £4900 was from the BR/Fell Developments one-off Derby 1950-built diesel No. 10100, some way ahead of the top steam representative, a 1903 Gibb & Hogg plate believed to have come from an 0-4-0ST (£3300).

Finalising the steam locomotive connection, we turn our attention to an 'Irish Mail' 1950s headboard (£1600) and a 72B Salisbury shedplate (£1200).

Away from the steam scene, totems are demanding attention, aided and abetted by Southern Railway target signs. Top of the totems was BR(W) Bath Green Park from the former SDJR terminus which fetched £7400, while behind came a battle involving four competitors that at times was too close to call. The eventual winner for this runner-up slot was BR(S) Yeovil Town, selling for £6600, ahead by the smallest margin of BR(M) Derby Nottingham Road (£6500), followed by a second London Midland Region participant, Bassenthwaite Lake (£6200) and BR(S) Stalbridge – another SDJR station – which sold for £6000.

Southern Railway target signs were also in battling mode, as illustrated by the top seller, Lyme Regis, going for £5300, a success doubtless influenced by this being the first appearance of such a target at a railwayana auction. Second place went to the Cuckoo Line station of Heathfield at £3100.

The signalling sector in its various forms was also an active marketplace that saw the top realisation of £2300 being achieved by GWR signalbox nameboard Corsham, followed by a Tyer's No. 6 Torrington Junction-Petrockstow single line tablet at £1300, a price matched by a GWR ex-Salisbury 'box lever lead.

Other category winners included a 1937 Southern Railway 'Summer services for winter visitors' poster by the prolific and highly respected artist Chas Pears (1873-1958), which sold for £4000, a Cockermouth Keswick & Penrith Railway circa 1865 ex-Bassenthwaite Lake station 14in dial clock which went for £3700, a 1909 painting of London Tilbury & Southend Railway 4-4-2 No. 80 by Thomas Rudd (1861-1940), who worked under the pseudonym F Moore (£3300) and a Somerset & Dorset Joint Railway handlamp brass plated 'Midsomer Norton J. Smith Signalman' (£1600). Prices exclude buyer's premium of 15% (+ VAT).

"Steam worksplates were strong, and there was a bit of an improvement in totems," mused boss Simon Turner, of the 1000-lot auction. "An interesting two days."

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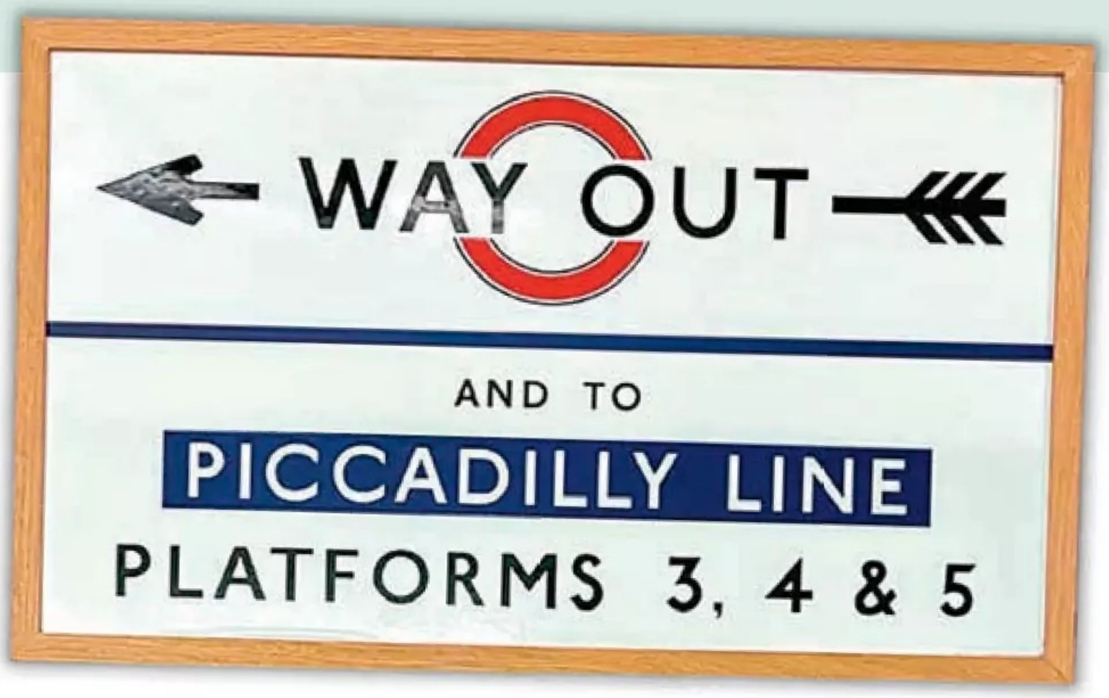
Nameplate sale is no myth!



DICK Whittington the man may have been the Lord Mayor of London in 14th century English folklore, but there was no myth about the nameplate *Dick Whittington* from Metropolitan Railway electric locomotive No. 13, which fetched £2200 in a Transport Auctions of London sale on February 28. The Bo-Bo was one of a batch built by Metropolitan-Vickers in 1922/23 and withdrawn in 1962 after the electrification of the line to Amersham.

Remaining in leafy Buckinghamshire, a London Underground Chalfont and Latimer station platform roundel went for £900, although this realisation was beaten by a 1933 first edition Harry Beck diagrammatic Underground pocket map at £1400, followed by a late 1910s/early1920s 'Underground map of London' advertising the Metropolitan Railway, which sold for £1300.

Another Underground map of London from a similar era advertising St Pancras station as the London terminus of the Midland Railway went for £850, a 1930s 'Way out and to Piccadilly Line' sign, believed to be ex-Holborn station, sold for £800, and a London Underground one-off experimental 'Depot clerk' cap badge, probably from circa late 1950s that was never issued, went under the hammer for £750.

Two final realisations were £650 for a 1933 Harry Beck Underground pocket map overprinted with the departure points of Black & White and Red & White buses and coaches to South Wales and the west of England, and £550 for a Metropolitan Railway Edgware Road station direction sign from the early 1900s. Prices exclude buyer's premium of 15% (+ VAT).

Railwayana Auction Calendar

- **April 18**
  Thirsk Railwayana
- **April 25**
  Main Line Railwayana
- **April 28**
  Lacy Scott & Knight *(railwayana and models)*
- **April 29/30**
  Vectis *(model trains)*
- **May 4-29**
  Paddington Ticket Auctions

Totems in pole position ahead of Class 37s

ALTHOUGH Class 37 diesel worksplates put on a strong show in Main Line Railwayana's February 28 live online auction, totem platform signs were the unchallenged winners after contenders from the Eastern, Southern and Western Regions filled the top positions on the grid.

First place went to BR(E) King's Lynn, which sold for £2000, while joint runners-up at £1300 apiece were the Southern Region's Exmouth and BR(W) Exeter St David's, with the final four-figure achiever in the category being BR(E) Barnetby that went for exactly £1000.

A diagram from Willoughby Station signalbox in Lincolnshire also sold for £1000, as did the first of the English Electric/Vulcan Foundry Class 37 worksplates, a 1962 example from D6815 (later No. 37609). In this plate's wake came three at £850 each, from 1962-built D6746 (No. 37046) and 1963-built duo D6838 (No. 37138) and D6933 (No.37233), and a 1961 plate from D6741(No. 37520) that realised £750.

At this juncture, steam went under the spotlight with a cabside numberplate from GWR No. 4993 *Dalton Hall* that also sold for £750, and the smokebox numberplate from Swindon-built H G Ivatt-designed LMS Class 2MT 2-6-0 No. 46524 that went for £700, a price matched by an LSWR ex-Wimbledon Park signalbox 8in dial clock. Prices exclude buyer's premium of 15%.

Bench is the platform for success

A Great Eastern Railway platform bench from the Cambridgeshire station of Wisbech sold for £920 in a railwayana and collectors' models auction held by Lacy Scott & Knight of Bury St Edmunds on February 27. The station, which was opened by the Eastern Counties Railway in March 1848 and closed in 1968, was the terminus of the Wisbech & Upwell Tramway and also the location of a two-road engine shed, a sub-shed of March (31B), which closed to steam in 1953 and completely in 1966.

Top price in the auction was £1700 for Great Central Railway 2-4-2T No. 583 constructed in O-gauge three-rail electric by Leeds Model Co, followed by a late-1930s Hornby O-gauge No. 6201 *Princess Elizabeth* (£580) and a Piercy Models O-gauge LNER B1 No. 61043 (£500). Prices exclude buyer's premium of 22½% (+ VAT).

SOUTH ACTON

South Acton lead the way in TRA sale

BR(M) platform totem South Acton led the way in the Talisman Railwayana sale of the late Andrew Proctor's collection on March 21 with a price of £7200. The station, in the London borough of Ealing, was opened by the North & South Western Junction Railway in 1880 and is now on the London Overground.

A North London Railway Tyer's two-gang block indicator instrument which was part of the 1891 Broad Street signalling scheme was the runner-up at £6300. Both prices exclude buyer's premium of 15% (+ VAT). Full details of the auction will be in next month's railwayana column.

Model track defies the odds

IN a Vectis auction on February 25 that would typically see a model locomotive head the realisation list, a quantity of O-gauge track and pointwork produced by Maldon Track that was estimated to sell for up to £60 topped the leader board with a price of £1000.

Normal service followed when a Hornby OO-gauge Thomas and Friends' locomotive *Murdoch* fetched £750, and a selection of Tri-ang OO-gauge rolling and accessories for £660. Nor far adrift were two DJH Models O-gauge locomotives, A4 No. 7 *Sir Nigel Gresley* (£640) and Standard Class 9F No. 92134 (£620), and at £600 an O-gauge Anglo American Oil Co-liveried tank wagon produced by Carette of Germany for Bassett-Lowke in circa 1910. The prices quoted exclude buyer's premium of 22½% (+ VAT).

IoW appeal tops the mainland

THE enduring appeal of the Isle of Wight's railways was underlined in Great Central's quarterly sale on March 7 when a nameplate from W2 *Yarmouth* sold for £19,500. The E1 class 0-6-0T was built by the LBSCR in 1880, was transferred to the island by the Southern Railway in 1932, and withdrawn in September 1956 after a service life of 76 years. A further success for the island was the sale for £5000 of a wooden pattern for nameplate *Chale*, the name carried by O2 class 0-4-4T W31 from 1929 until its withdrawal in March 1967.

Crossing the Solent to the mainland, nameplates that went to new homes included *Howard of Effingham* from SR Lord Nelson class No. 30854 at £7500, a price matched by *Saint Augustine* and cabside numberplate from GWR No. 2914. In addition, *Duke of Sutherland* from LNWR Claughton class 4-6-0 No. 21/LMS No. 5903 sold for £5800, *Doldowlod Hall* from GWR No. 5942 for £4600, and *Hector* from another LNWR locomotive, Newton class No. 304/Improved Precedent LMS No. 5035, for £4000. A non-seller in the category was *Sir Lamorak* from SR King Arthur No. 30451.

Top of the steam worksplates at £5000 was an 1895 De Winton & Co of Carnarvon plate believed to have come from either of two vertical-boilered quarry locomotives, 3ft gauge *Llanfair,* now preserved and on display at the Welsh Highland Railway, or another quarry engine, 2ft gauge *Arthur,* which was withdrawn in the 1940s and scrapped in 1956.

The runner-up in this category with a £3000 hammer price was an 1898 Chapman & Furneaux of Gateshead 'successors to Black Hawthorn and Co' plate from a standard gauge 0-6-0T named *Ealhswith*, which was supplied new to the Lambourn Valley Railway, sold to the Cambrian Railway in 1904 and numbered 26 and its name removed, entered GWR stock in 1923 and renumbered 820, was withdrawn in 1930 and sold to a Frome colliery, and scrapped in 1945.

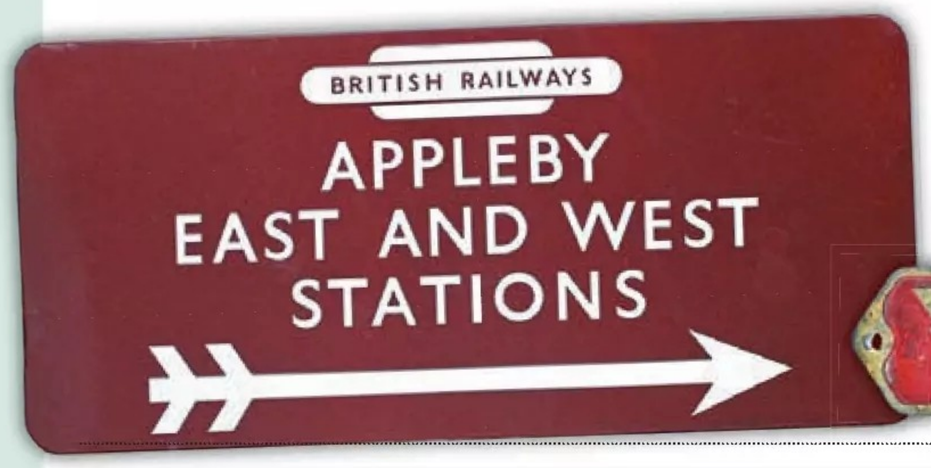
Standard Britannia No. 70025 *Western Star* headed the smokebox selection at £2250, while 3588 from an 1899 Swindon-built 2-4-0T that was withdrawn by BR in 1949 outshone all others in the GWR cabside numberplate line-up by realising £1700.

Totem platform signs were as popular as ever, as illustrated by top-sellers BR(S) Barnstaple Town and BR(NE) Barnard Castle each achieving £4000, the top SR target sign was Wokingham (£3200), a 1909 diagram from Tregaron Station signalbox on the Aberystwyth to Carmarthen route caught the eye at £2400, and so too did a Georgemas Junc-Thurso Tyer's No. 6 single line tablet from the Far North Line that fetched £2200.

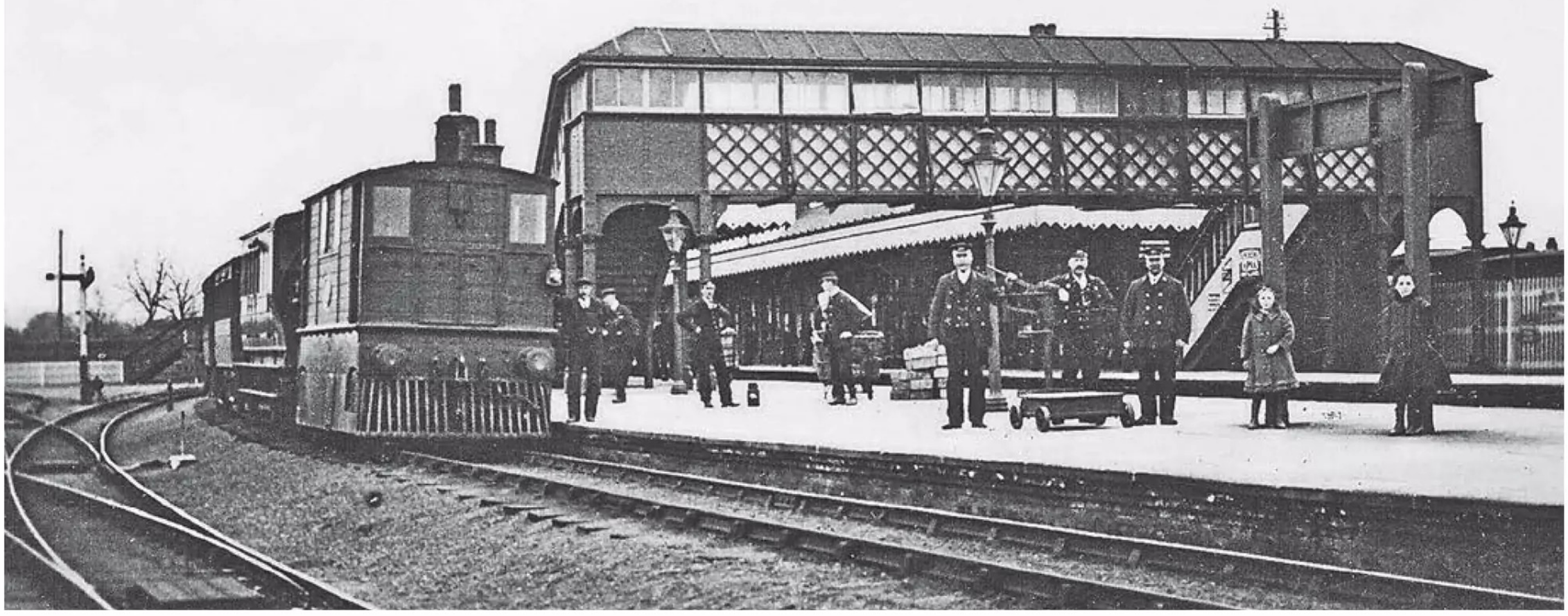
Also worthy of mention are a BR(M) Appleby East and West Stations direction sign (£2000), a pair of Stockton & Darlington Railway passes from 1849 and the following year that each sold for £1700, and a 'Palatine' headboard from the London St Pancras to Manchester express that went to a new home for £1300. Prices exclude buyer's premium of 15% (+ VAT).

"Highly contested all round," said auctioneer Martin Quartemain post-sale.

"Isle of Wight memorabilia always does well, and in this regard, *Yarmouth* is a good name. Signalbox diagrams also good, but shedplates less so."



Wisbech station staff (and their children?) pose for the camera in an early but undated photograph also showing a Wisbech & Upwell Tramway train waiting for its next turn of duty on the left. A GER platform bench from the station sold for £920 at a Lacy Scott & Knight railwayana and collectors' models sale on February 27, a report of which is in this column. CREATIVE COMMONS



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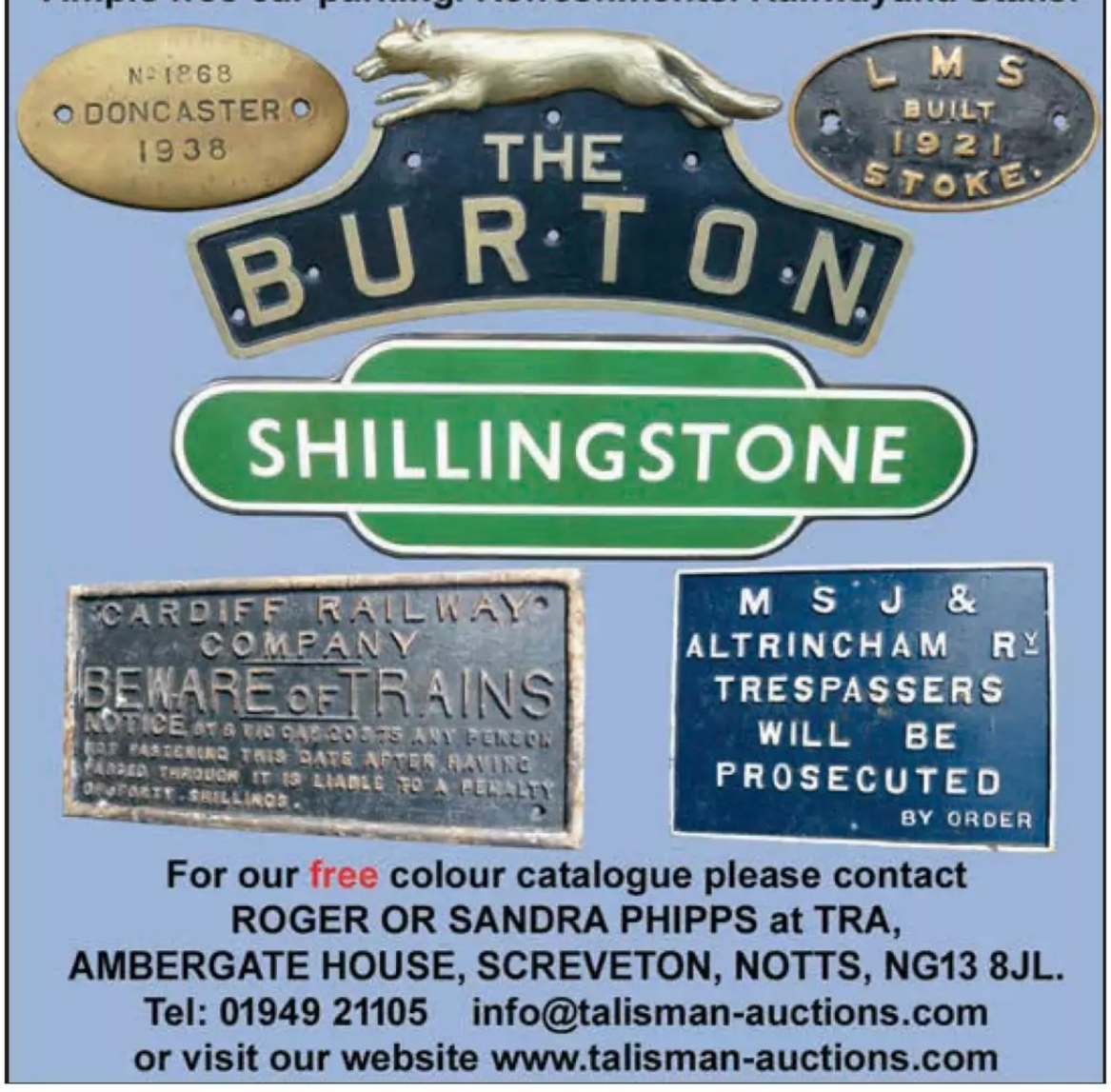

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LISTEN TO FEEDBACK, DELIVER SUCCESS!

The mid-March visit to the Mid-Hants Railway of Gresley A3 Flying Scotsman went without a hitch, with lessons from previous events helping guide the planning and execution throughout, as Owen Hayward reports.

IMPROVED and better access to see the star locomotive, as well as helping to curate the visitor itinerary, ensured the Mid-Hants Railway pulled off a hugely successful fortnight when LNER A3 4-6-2 No. 60103 *Flying Scotsman* made a return visit to the railway – with the majority of the experiences offered selling out!

The Gresley Pacific's journey to Hampshire saw it towed by a pair of Rail Adventure's lCass 43 HST power cars, the consist arriving at Alton during the afternoon of March 7. From there *Flying Scotsman* headed to the MHR's locomotive depot at Ropley, where it was prepared in readiness for the first of its advertised experiences on March 10, which on this occasion was for footplate visits. Through to March 22, it then starred in five additional static days and five running days, with an average of 91% of spaces available sold – and saw the carriage fleet travel over 8500 miles during this time!

Adapt and implement

Given the interest it has among the general public let alone the enthusiast sector, it is very unlikely that a visit by No. 60103 would be unsuccessful, but ensuring that visitors go away happy is key and the MHR's planning team had this at the forefront of their minds.

The A3 last visited in 2020 to reopen Butts Bridge near Alton, which had been rebuilt during the construction of an adjacent housing estate, and since then similar event setups have been run for the launch of SR Merchant Navy 4-6-2 No. 35006 *Canadian Pacific* (*Heritage Railway* issue 331) and LNER A4 No. 60007 *Sir Nigel Gresley* (issue 338) in 2026. While it can be easy to get complacent and reuse the same template each time, one thing the MHR has done is listen to feedback from these and use that to implement improvements, thus ensuring that the public has as positive an experience as possible.

This stretches to the very start of a visitor's engagement with what is being offered: making it clear what they will get when booking. While customers still went away from those events happy, "one area of feedback that we had was that they thought they were getting a much longer and more immersive journey" explains business operations manager Oliver Phillips. "From the outset we have to be clear that this is a ten-mile heritage railway and not a main line excursion. For static footplate visits, some also said signage was unclear, so addressing that was also important so they don't feel like they are left to wander aimlessly around."

Wherever the A3 goes, it invariably attracts crowds – and while great for the bank balance, thronging platforms can make it difficult to move about. Access to stations along the line (including a viewing gallery at Alresford) was restricted to day ticket holders only, which resulted in a much smoother flow of people, to say nothing of the safety considerations too.

It can be all to appealing to try and fit in as many workings as possible, but this too can have a detrimental effect on matters. "Leaving the A3 at the same end of the train all day meant we could offer sufficient dwell time between services" Oliver added. "This allowed every visitor an opportunity to capture the perfect photograph and not feel rushed." In total, four round trips behind the A3 were on offer on each of the running days, while an additional steam-hauled service followed it between Alresford and Alton. Inbetween those, the recently-arrived Class 150 'Sprinter' DMU shuttled between Alresford and Ropley, spreading out visitor parking across the whole route and reducing any crush that might have been experienced if concentrated at just one station. Tickets aboard a *Flying Scotsman* train permitted access to all of these, meaning that visitors could explore everything that the railway offered.

Another point addressed was the visibility of the star attraction. The platform length meant that in the past the locomotive was beyond the ramp at Alresford, meaning that being able to actually see what you were visiting for was a challenge. Over the winter, platform 1 here has been extended by 46 yards, thus allowing the train to stop further back – which had the added benefit of clearing the foot crossing. The operational setup for running days therefore meant the supplementary services could arrive

***Flying Scotsman* powers through Medstead & Four Marks son the Mid-Hants Railway with an Alton-bound service on March 21.** OWEN HAYWARD

Above: With the setting sun creating a glow in the sky above, *Flying Scotsman* passes through Ropley, banking its final train of its Mid-Hants visit on March 21. OWEN HAYWARD

Right: Sunshine glints off No. 60103 as it climbs past North Street with its seven-coach train on March 14. NICK GILLIAM

On shed: A photographic evening took place at Ropley on March 11, in partnership with camera specialists from Nikon, with scenes around the locomotive yard featuring the visiting A3. Although not in steam, a smoke machine added authentic atmosphere. STEPHEN MORLEY

You might think this was a scene at a main line station, but it is the Mid-Hants Railway's own at Alresford. Two generations of rail travel meet, with the MHR's latest acquisition, Class 150 No. 150231, alongside *Flying Scotsman*. The 'Sprinter' proved invaluable to services during the A3's visit, with shuttles between here and Ropley helping to keep the masses moving. RICHARD BENTLEY/MHR

in platform 2, with visitors subsequently being guided to cross in front of the locomotive, enabling them to see and photograph the A3 with ease.

Publicity booms

It is a fact that wherever *Flying Scotsman* goes, the media will follow it. Although to some enthusiasts this is a deterrent, you cannot argue that the publicity this A3 generates for any railway that it visits is a much-needed boon, particularly in financially-turbulent times such as these.

The MHR's Facebook page saw a 32% increase in followers during the first quarter, with the largest spike having been after the January announcement of the A3's visit. Furthermore, 200 people subscribed to the railway's newsletter, while national media attention saw TV crews from both BBC and ITV attend for coverage, plus quarter page images printed in both The Times and The Telegraph newspapers.

The result of all this was that approximately 7100 people visited the railway when *Flying Scotsman* was running services, equating to 95% of seats available being filled. More than 1400 afternoon teas and 480 breakfasts were served on these days, which offered something at a wide range of price points. Visits to the static days equated to somewhere in the region of 87%, but the feedback was reported to be just as overwhelmingly positive.

As well as these two main experiences, photography evenings took place at Ropley on both March 11 and 18, hosted in partnership with experts from Nikon. A similar event ran last autumn with *Sir Nigel Gresley*, and saw a number of stationary scenes set up around the locomotive yard. A number of appropriately-dressed reenactors also enabled some people-centric scenes to take place on the platforms.

"What made this event truly exceptional was the spirit, professionalism and passion of every volunteer and staff member involved" Ollie concluded. "Every team contributed to an experience worthy of *Flying Scotsman*'s iconic status."

The tour continues

Flying Scotsman departed the railway on March 23, this time being top and tailed by the same two HST power cars that brought it from Birmingham. This time, the A3 was destined for York where it went display in the main hall at the National Railway Museum between March 28 and April 24.

In May, No. 60103 will appear at the Great Central Railway (Nottingham) for the first time, the visit happening in partnership with Fox & Edwards events. Trains will run there on May 23-25 and 30/31, starting and finishing at Ruddington Fields station for a return journey of approximately 20 miles to the outskirts of Loughborough and back. First class travel is available aboard a GWR Hawksworth saloon complete with a complimentary glass of fizz and canapes. Static experiences include afternoon tea and four course dinners sat around the locomotive in the shed on May 20/21, with footplate visits available on the same dates plus May 26-28. For full details and to book visit tinyurl.com/GCRN-Scotsman

The A3 will later head for the East Lancashire Railway, where it will pull trains on June 5-7 and 13/14. Dining services here are on offer for June 5, 6 and 14, with a welcome glass of prosecco and live music to greet people upon arrival at Bury Bolton Street, followed by a four-course meal served at your table during the journey. For details of all these services, visit tinyurl.com/East-Lancs-Scotsman

From August 4-31, No. 60103 will be on static display at Locomotion in Shildon, giving people a chance to get up close and personal with this famous machine during a summer of celebration in the world's first railway town, from where the award-winning Stockton & Darlington replica train commenced its anniversary main line run last September.

In the autumn, *Flying Scotsman* will travel south once again, this time bound for the Swanage Railway, where it will spend ten days from October 23 until November 1. Static days on October 23, 26/27, and 30/31 will once again enable footplate visits at Swanage station, with trains being hauled by the A3 on October 24/25, 28/29 and November 1; during its visit, *Flying Scotsman* will be coupled to the 'Devon Belle' Pullman observation saloon, which accompanied it during the infamous USA tour from 1969-1972. After becoming stranded out there after the company operating the tour went into bankruptcy, the coachwas repatriated from San Francisco by Swanage Railway volunteers in 2007. Full details of services during this visit, including any premium offerings, will be confirmed in July, when tickets will also go on sale; see tinyurl.com/Swanage-Scotsman HR

No. 2 end cab from Deltic No. 55008 *The Green Howards*, which is currently displayed at the Deltic Preservation Society's base at Barrow Hill, during restoration. DPS

WINNING ANOTHER BATTLE FOR *THE GREEN HOWARDS!*

Sally Clifford chats to Bethany Lacy about her involvement in the restoration of an important piece of Deltic transportation history.

Women are continuing to play their own part in what was traditionally a man's world. Railways are no longer male-dominated as they once were, and women have been welcomed into workplaces where in bygone times the jobs were mainly for the boys.

It was while attending a special event at the Deltic Preservation Society depot at Barrow Hill Roundhouse Museum that I met mechanical fitter Bethany Lacy, who is among the women changing this once traditional trend.

Bethany, along with husband Nigel, was involved in the restoration of the No. 2 end cab from Class 55 Deltic No. 55008 *The Green Howards,* which is currently displayed there. One of 22 built in 1961 by English Electric for BR, No. 55008/D9008 was scrapped in the early 1980s at Doncaster Works – aside from the cab, which was privately bought and owned before being purchased for preservation in 1986 by the Deltic Preservation Society.

Deltics, predecessors to the Inter-City 125 High Speed Trains, were used on the East Coast Main Line out of King's Cross before they were phased out during the early 1980s. D9008/55008 joins three of the surviving six Deltics at the museum. They are D9009/55009 *Alycidon*, returning to the rails this year (see News, page 19), and D9015/55015 *Tulyar,* which is currently undergoing testing: also due to return to traffic soon, it is earmarked for the Great Central Railway's September 3-6 autumn diesel gala on as reported in Headline News page 7. D9019/55019 *Royal Highland Fusilier* is currently subject to a fundraising appeal which aims to raise £85,000 to return it to the main line. Maintenance includes internal cosmetic work and repaint; some electrical and mechanical work, along with main line equipment fitting.

"Deltics are the keystone between steam and the HST. They were only supposed to be running for 10 years, but because electric never came in on the ECML, it extended them for a further decade. HST came in, and that was the demise of the Deltics," said Nigel, who is involved in fundraising for the DPS.

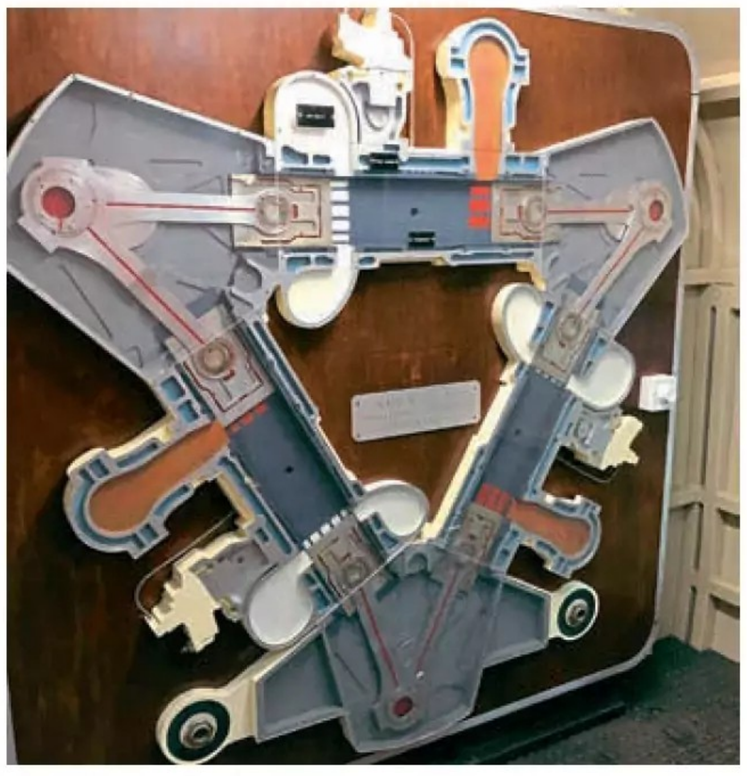
Before becoming a static display at the museum, D9008/55008 was previously transported to railway events as a train simulator project.

Bethany said: "I would like to see the cab become an interactive exhibit where you pull levers and dials move, you press buttons and you get to hear sound effects and so on. It would require some assistance to achieve, but I still have the hope we can get there." She said they also hope to kit out the interior of the cab as it would have been.

Bethany credits her father with introducing her to a love of trains, particularly Deltics. She recalls she was nine months old when she embarked on her first train trip on the East Lancashire Railway behind D9019.

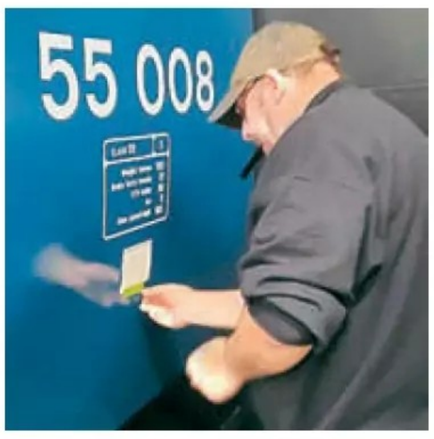
"Let's just say it's not a hobby to me, it's more of a lifestyle – I have known no different," she said. "Growing up, my dad continued to take me out on the railways, and when we got a bit older, we'd go out to railway events as a family – myself, parents and sister. We did a bit of everything – steam, diesel, but mostly Deltics. My parents took over the sales officer role at the Deltic Preservation Society in 2012, and

Bethany and Nigel Lacy, who were involved in *The Green Howards* Deltic cab restoration. SALLY CLIFFORD



A Napier Deltic engine cross section displayed inside No. 2 end cab. SALLY CLIFFORD

Under control: inside No. 2 end cab during restoration. DPS



Above: Nigel puts the finishing touches to No. 2 end cab. DPS

Right: Completion of the interior restoration of No. 2 end cab. DPS

Left: Normandy veteran Ken Cooke and guests during the two minutes' silence to commemorate the 80th anniversary of VJ Day beside *The Green Howards*. SALLY CLIFFORD

Right: Ken in the driving seat at the VJ commemoration service at Barrow Hill. NICK BIELBY

that prompted many more trips away. When I could drive, my sister and I would regularly attend events, regardless of what was running, to meet up with friends we'd made over the years at galas and on railtours.

"I developed an interest in the engineering aspect as I reached my teenage years, and I went onto study mechanical engineering at college. I managed to get an apprenticeship with Wabtec Rail (as known then) after completing my first year."

Helping her parents with the sales stand at the DPS led Bethany into volunteering for the society, where she is now museum manager and sales officer: "I joined at Barrow Hill volunteering shortly after my 14th birthday in August 2011 and got stuck in with a variety of tasks."

Bethany progressed from cleaning the locomotives and tidying to painting and helping with engineering tasks. "Over the years, as I progressed with my college course, I became more involved with the engineering side and worked on the spare power units, helped complete exam work, trained and passed out as a travelling fitter supporting the locos out and about, and I even did a turn on one of our main line trips with D9009."

By 2019, the restoration of No. 55008 cab became Bethany and Nigel's focus.

"The main part of the restoration began when we sent the cab away to be extended by four feet to display a working cross section of a Deltic engine in the 'engine room'," they explained.

Bethany credits a volunteer member whose generosity covered the extension and move costs, and the work was carried out by Crowle Wharf Engineers Limited.

Once returned to Barrow Hill, work began on the cosmetic refresh. "We had stripped out pretty much every piece you can see in or on the cab for a full cosmetic refresh. The aim was to rebuild the cab as close as we could to a complete cab," said Bethany.

"Throughout the restoration, my role was project manager, but I still got very hands-on working with a group of volunteers. There must have been six to eight of us on a regular basis, with a few others helping out here and there."

Since its completion in 2022 following a year-long restoration, the cab took centre stage at a special VJ commemoration at the museum, where it sits beside a beautiful painted mural of a photograph taken at King's Cross station where the Deltics were once a familiar sight.

"We want to keep history alive. It is to inspire new generations, whether they want to work for the railway or become engineers – it is keeping something alive," said Nigel.

Seeing the locomotive – whose name is significant to the regiment with which he served – was a particularly poignant occasion for centenarian Ken Cooke, the society's special guest. Despite his advancing years, Ken attends as many events as he can to commemorate comrades lost and ensure the stories of their sacrifices live on.

The significance of Friday, August 15, 2025 is now stamped in history as the 80th anniversary of Japan's surrender which brought an end to the Second World War.

After participating in the national two minutes' silence alongside guests, Ken paid tribute to fallen comrades and acknowledged the sacrifices they made.

Ascending the staircase, Ken – who served with the Green Howards 7th Battalion – had the opportunity to sit in the driving seat of the No. 2 end cab from No .55008 during his visit.

He also signed a special memorial cross in remembrance of his comrades with the Green Howards 7th Battalion, which he placed on the front of the cab.

"I haven't seen it before, and it is a pleasure to see it like that to represent the regiment I was with. It is special," Ken said.

As the surviving member and president of the York Normandy Veterans, an association for veterans who participated in the D-Day landings and the battles to liberate France, Ken is keen to acknowledge his comrades wherever and whenever possible and has participated in many high-profile commemoration events over the years, returning to Normandy several times where, as an 18-year-old serviceman, he landed on Gold Beach.

As well as having the Deltic named after his regiment, Ken's name is carried on Ruston & Hornsby 4wDM No. 441934 of 1960 *Rowntree No. 3*, part of the Derwent Valley Light Railway collection, which worked at the famous York sweet factory where Ken also worked. Last year, First Bus York also named one of its fleet after Ken.

Nick Beilby, a member of the York Normandy Veterans, and chairman of York Area Group of the North Yorkshire Moors Railway and life member of the Derwent Valley Light Railway, thanked the DPS for inviting members.

"We are here for commemoration, remembrance and respect, and we would also like to thank the DPS for inviting us here and Paul Simpson from the LNER for making this happen.

"We wanted Ken to see the remains of *The Green Howards* and to thank him and everyone who served at home and abroad to give us the freedom – lest we forget. Thank you to Ken and the lads and lasses," said Nick. HR

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The DPS has three Class 55s in working order. 55009 and D9015 will be visiting heritage railways this year, whilst 55019 undergoes maintenance. A welcome awaits new members - do consider joining this thriving society with 1,200 members. You receive four copies annually of the 'Deltic Deadline' magazine with news, photos and articles. Come to Barrow Hill depot to lend a hand no matter what are your skills, gender and time available - there's great cameraderie and you will be helping keep the sound of Napiers alive. All the information about the DPS and how to easily join can be found by looking at the DPS' website:

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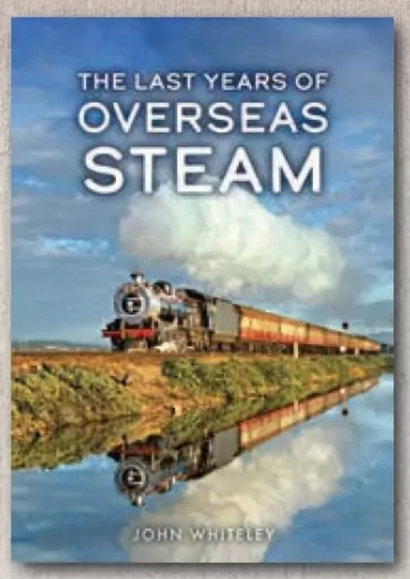

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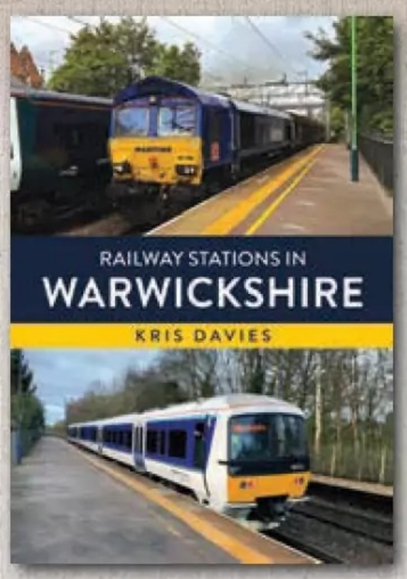

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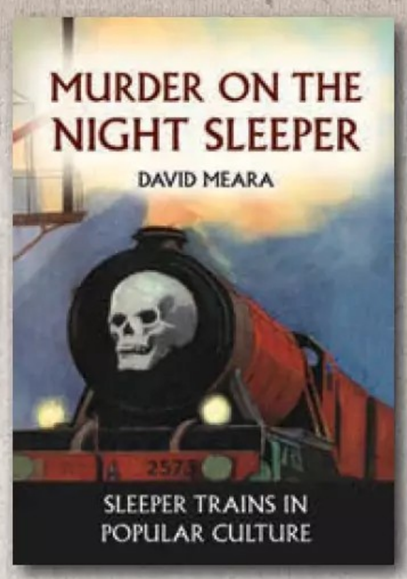

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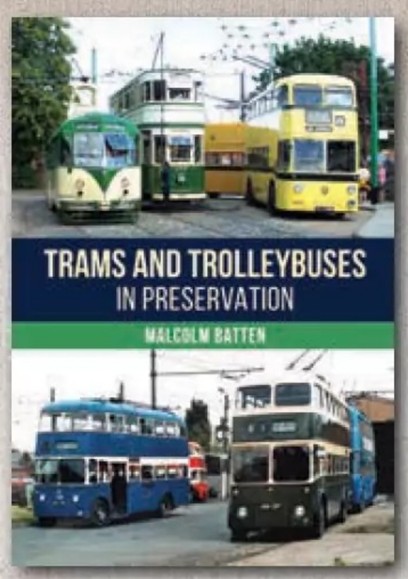

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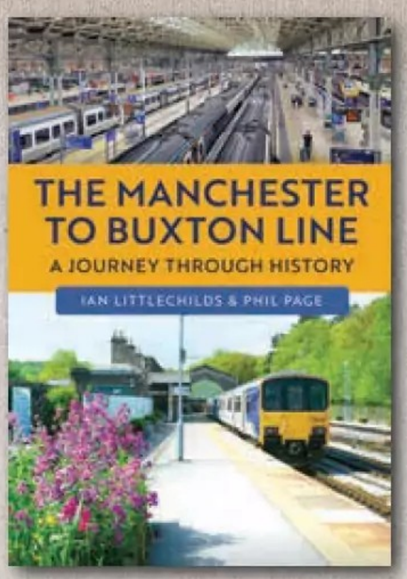

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SPRING SUCCESS

Unalike partners *Ann* and *Dora* prepare to depart Keighley with a Vintage Carriages trust three-coach rake on a passenger shuttle to Ingrow on March 21. RODNEY TOWERS

No. 5029 *Nunney Castle* pulls into Oxenhope on March 21. BEN BUCKI

NUNNEY BECOMES KING OF THE KEIGHLEY CASTLE!

The Keighley & Worth Valley Railway's March 19-22 steam gala has been hailed as its most successful ever – with two of its visiting locomotives bringing a decidedly West Country touch to the northern heritage outpost, reports **Robin Jones.**

Crowds flocked to the Keighley & Worth Valley Railway's annual early spring steam gala, which starred three high-profile guest locomotives in GWR 4-6-0 No. 5029 *Nunney Castle*, Bulleid West Country light Pacific No.34046 *Braunton*, both currently based at Crewe, and Ian Riley's LMS 'Black Five' 4-6-0 No. 45407 *The Lancashire Fusilier.*

Blessed by sunshine for the most part, the event attracted some 4500 visitors – up from the 4000 who attended last year's gala.

Organiser Kieran Pilsworth said: "It was our biggest and most successful gala ever.

"When you get GWR and Southern engines in the north, it makes a difference.

"*Nunney Castle* was the star, because it has not been to many places yet, and *Braunton* was only the fifth Bulleid Pacific that we have had on the line.

"It was the right mix of locomotives for the good tried-and-tested formula we have on the Worth Valley."

As highlighted in *Heritage Railway* issue 332, *Nunney Castle*, which was outshopped from Swindon Works in 1934, returned to steam last April following extensive boiler repairs at LNWR Crewe after a decade out of action. Its Collett superheater was replaced by a later pattern three-row version to allow the locomotive to deal with the lower quality of coal that it is now required to burn.

Braunton, built at Brighton Works in 1946, last returned to steam in 2024 after undergoing a major overhaul.

A unique feature this year was the dual

Haworth shed at 7am on March 21 sees, left to right, Bulleid West Country light Pacific No. 34046 *Braunton* with home-based Ivatt 2MT 2-6-2T No. 41241 and BR Standard 2MT 2-6-0T No. 78022. RODNEY TOWERS

Visiting GWR 4-6-0 No.5029 *Nunney Castle* and Bulleid West County 4-6-2 *Braunton* double head past Oakworth mound on March 20. RODNEY TOWERS

A little lost? On March 21, Bulleid light Pacific No. 34036 *Braunton* heads the 'Bournemouth Belle' – through West Yorkshire! ROBERT BATTY

LNWR Coal Tank 0-6-2T No.1054 and Ivatt 2MT 2-6-2T No. 41241 at Damens loop on March 21. DYLAN CREESE

LMS 'Black Five' 4-6-0 No. 45407 passes the operating LNER Grafton 10-ton steam crane at Oakworth. KWVR

***Nunney Castle* departing Oakworth on March 21.** MARTIN CREESE

Back to back Lancashire & Yorkshire Railway 0-6-0 No 52044 and visiting No. 45407 shortly after departing Haworth on March 19. MATTHEW DITCH

operation of home-based Sentinel 0-4-0 VBGT *Ann* and Avonside 0-4-0ST No. 1793 *Dora*, both by coincidence built in 1927 in different locations and both very different types of locomotive altogether.

Ann, the oldest original Sentinel locomotive, was built in Shrewsbury as an industrial shunter for British Tar Products Products Limited in Manchester before being withdrawn in approximately 1969.

Dora was built by the Avonside Engine Company at Bristol for the British Electricity Authority at Barton, also near Manchester, and later operated at the Rugby Cement works at Barrington Quarry. Following withdrawal and entry into preservation, No. 1973 was briefly based at Haworth Yard during the 1970s and while it did not operate passenger trains, it was steamed and ran up and down the Haworth loop. It was later sold and moved to the Nene Valley Railway, before subsequent periods at the Rutland Railway Museum (now Rocks by Rail) and the private Rippingale station in Lincolnshire. It underwent an extensive restoration in recent years at Riley & Son (E) Ltd, and has returned to Haworth once more.

During the gala, the pair ran a short distance passenger shuttle train between Keighley and Ingrow. The duo operated very well together as a partnership with visually sufficient differences to invite enquiry.

Another gala attraction was the Grafton steam crane demonstration at Oakworth.

The gala success followed in the wake of the KWVR winning the Heritage Railway Association's Event of the Year award at the annual HRA awards evening in Llandudno on March 7, for its Railway Children theatre show, as reported last issue. The performance, a combined venture with Bradford City of Culture and York Theatre Royal, included a steam train ride through the set of the original movie and a two-hour theatrical performance. HR

Above: *Nunney Castle* at Damems with the shuttle. BR Standard 2MT No. 78022 was on the rear. MATTHEW DITCH

Right: *Braunton* departs Keighley with the 8.15am goods train bound for Oxenhope ON MARCH 19. MATTHEW DITCH

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Oxford Rail treads new GWR ground – and old favourite gets an upgrade

TWO new OO gauge steam locomotives will be added to Oxford Rail's growing range of railway models as the firm steps back into the spotlight following years as a subsidiary of its now rival company Hornby Hobbies.

In 2021, Hornby acquired the majority stake in Oxford Diecast which included its Oxford Rail brand. In 2024, the Oxford brand was sold for £1.4 million to EKD Enterprises, which was headed up by former Oxford Diecast chairman Lyndon Davies. Since then, the firm has pressed on with previously announced projects that had seemingly stalled, such as its Cowans Sheldon 15-ton crane – and now it has announced the first new models for some years.

Perhaps the most intriguing of these is the GWR 2-6-0 2600 class, something which has never been seen in ready-to-run form before. Also known as the 'Aberdares,' the class was designed under the stewardship of William Dean and saw 80 examples built between 1900 and 1907. Primarily intended for coal traffic in and around South Wales, including from Aberdare (hence the class's nickname), they followed the Great Western's standardisation policies of the period, sharing components and general layout features with other classes.

Only 12 survived into BR ownership in January 1948, but withdrawals came fast, and just four remained by the end of August that same year. The final member, No. 2667, lasted until October 1949; none were preserved.

Variations among the class included both inside and outside frame types, with tenders differing between those running under GWR ownership and those owned by the Railway Operating Division during the First World War, the latter having larger Great Central-designed examples.

Full specs for these models have yet to be confirmed, but OR has stated that drive will be from a five-pole coreless motor, with pre-fitted features including firebox flicker effect and a stay-alive to ensure smooth, continuous running. RRP is set at £179.95, with delivery expected to occur in the third quarter of 2027.

Meanwhile, the firm's second announcement revealed that an icon of many a starter set will receive a new look. In 1983, Hornby introduced its model of Smokey Joe, an ex-Caledonian Railway 264 class 0-4-0ST 'Pug' modelled on locomotive No. 56025, which was a shunter at St Rollox Works in Glasgow. Having developed a rather grimy look, a person unknown scribed the name in the dirt, resulting in it becoming somewhat renowned. Sadly, none of the real-life examples survived into preservation, but Hornby's model has been a fixture of its catalogue since 1983, although is not up to modern standards and is perhaps best known for its high-speed chassis.

There is a certain irony that Oxford has chosen this prototype to add to its range after the company's sale by Hornby, but with industrial locomotive types having seen a surge in model representations in recent years, there is no doubt these will be another welcome addition. Introduced in 1883 to a design by Dugald Drummond and built by Neilson & Co, the later 611 class was similar in appearance and came from John F McIntosh and St Rollox Works. Seen largely in Scotland but also scattered through northern England, the class had a surprisingly long lifetime, with the last example withdrawn in 1962.

Similar features to the 'Aberdares' will be included, with RRP for these 'Pugs' set at £124.95 and delivery planned for the second quarter of 2027. A manufacturer's exclusive will portray the famous 'Smokey Joe' in a pristine BR condition and can be ordered through OR's website, www.oxforddiecast.co.uk

Rounding off a trio of new-tool announcements, OR will also be producing a new GER 10-ton cattle van. These classic cattle carriers were produced en-masse, with 800 built between 1900 and 1909, and used to convey livestock from and around East Anglia, though they managed to spread all the way to Scotland and South West England. Delivery is due around a similar time to the CR 'Pugs,' with RRP for these wagons set at £21.95 each.

Rapido has unveiled decorated samples of its highly-anticipated Kerr Stuart 'Sirdar' models, which are being presented in a vibrant array of liveries that will suit all tastes. These diminutive delights are packed with details and features including full cab details, while maintaining a quality powerful mechanism and digital capability. The order books have closed with the manufacturer, and some models are selling out on advanced orders with retailers too, so those looking to acquire one are advised to do so soon!

Wrexham-based manufacturer Dapol has announced a new batch of its Stroudley four-wheel carriages in O gauge, with its brake third, all third, all first and composite types due for release in LSWR's salmon and chocolate livery. These will look right at home behind the manufacturer's LBSCR 'Terrier,' which carries LSWR lined green, or provide a selection of stock for modellers with other kit-built locomotives of the region looking to expand their trains. Delivery is due as soon as May this year, with RRP starting at £127.02 for basic models, rising to £190.52 for DCC light bar-fitted examples.

Send your model news to staff writer **Owen Hayward** on **owen.hayward@kelsey.co.uk**

Go West: Rapido expands small prairie range

WITH its models of the GWR 4400 class 2-6-2Ts now on shelves and selling well, it was inevitable that Rapido Trains would soon turn its sights to the class's successor: the Class 4500s. The class is no stranger to OO scale ready-to-run, but this enhanced tooling will bring it into the 21st century to meet standards set by today's modellers.

The 4400 class small prairies were introduced in1904, but while efficient locomotives, their small wheels resulted in a limited top speed of about 40mph.

For the concept to be practical in other locations, a revision to the original design was required. CME George Churchward went back to the drawing board and adapted his design to incorporate larger driving wheels, with the prototype outshopped from Wolverhampton Works in 1906. The increase in wheel diameter may have only been six inches, but it was enough to increase the top speed to 60mph.

A further 19 were built at Wolverhampton before Swindon became the main locomotive works, and a total of 75 locomotives were built, the last of which came in 1924. Churchward made an eclectic mix of tweaks to the class throughout its lifetime to improve reliability, performance and range. This included superheated boilers, front-end support struts, outside steam pipes, and running boards modified from straight to curved front ends; some of these features have never been included on RTR models by other manufacturers.

You can look forward to a smooth-running mechanism, a factory-installed speaker, NEM coupler pockets, sprung buffers, a Next18 decoder socket and firebox flicker with a dynamic fire draw effect. Improving further on the design of the 4400, the 4500 will be fitted with a MoPower stay-alive capacitor. Twelve models are being produced, ranging from No. 2171 in pre-1906 GWR green to No. 4507 in BR lined green with late crest. Two preserved examples are also included: Severn Valley Railway-based No. 4566 and West Somerset Railway's No. 4561 will be in BR plain black with early crest and Great Western green respectively.

Models are currently at the tooling stage and RRP starts at £172.95 for DCC-ready models, with sound-fitted versions also being produced.

With its GWR locomotive range expanding, so too is Rapido's Evolution carriage range, with a new livery added to the third batch of models being produced. To accompany the new small prairie locomotives, GWR lined crimson lake will be applied to the firm's generic but highly-detailed bogie stock, with non-corridor brake third, third, first, composite and full brake examples set for release. Detailing for these includes features such as fully decorated compartment interiors and working lights, the brightness of which can be managed thanks to a potentiometer being fitted.

Carriages will be available as triple packs (RRP £199.95) and single vehicles (£69.95), with delivery set for the final months of 2026.

Take home yet another movie classic in miniature!

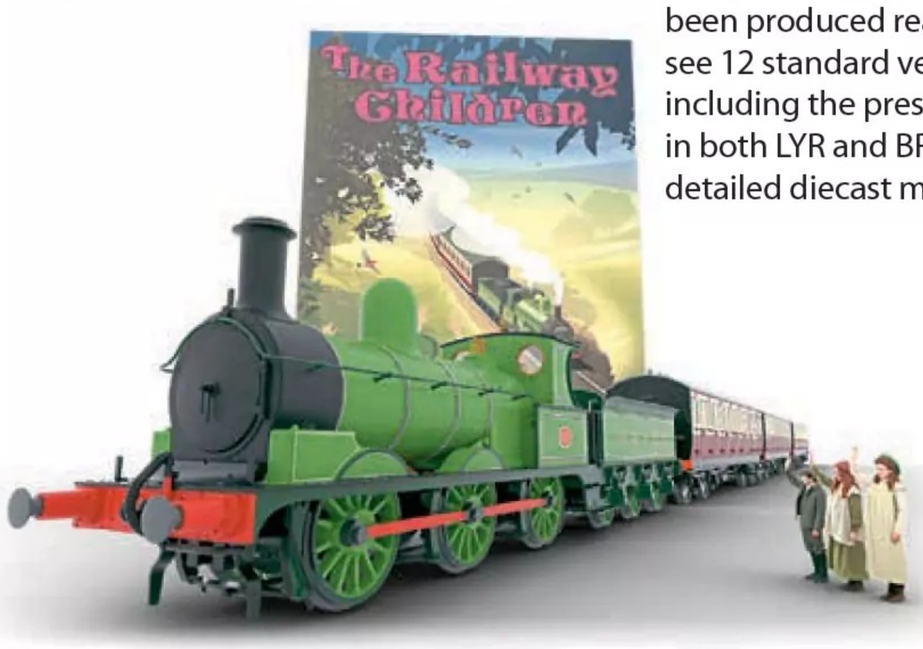
WITH The Titfield Thunderbolt already under its belt, cementing a strong working relationship with rights holder StudioCanal, a newsletter tease earlier this year from Rapido has now been confirmed: The Railway Children is next on the manufacturer's list!

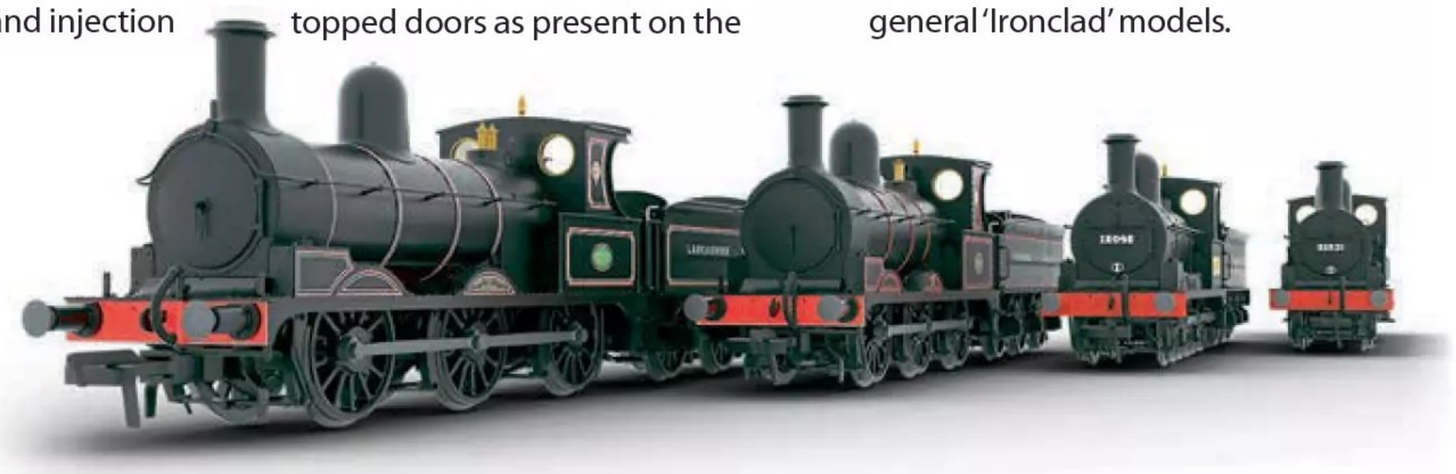
Announced simultaneously was the Lancashire & Yorkshire Railway Class 25 'Ironclad' 0-6-0, of which No. 957 (BR No. 52044) is the sole survivor, resident at the Keighley & Worth Valley Railway. This particular example was painted into a striking green livery of the fictional Great Northern & Southern Railway to fulfil the role of the 'Green Dragon,' the locomotive prominently featured in the 1970 silver screen adaptation of Edith Nesbit's beloved novel.

Rapido's planned model in OO scale will be the first time the class has been produced ready-to-run and will see 12 standard versions available, including the preserved example in both LYR and BR liveries. A highly detailed diecast metal and injection moulded body will give weight for ample adhesion, with a factory-fitted speaker, MoPower stay-alive capacity, plunger pick-ups and firebox flicker effect all included as standard. RRP starts at £219.95 for DCC-ready models. While models are currently in tooling, no estimated release date has yet been confirmed.

Meanwhile, The Railway Children train pack will include a model of the 'Ironclad' in its on-screen green livery, together with three of Rapido's freelance Evolution carriages also in GNSR colours, featuring round-topped doors as present on the Metropolitan Railway 'Dreadnought' stock also used during filming. As if that isn't enough, each pack also comes with 3D-printed figures of Bobbie, Phyllis and Peter (the titular children), a replica GNSR poster and tickets, plus a print of the 'Green Dragon' by renowned railway artist Jonathon Clay.

RRP is set at £439.95 for DCC-ready packs and £549.95 for DCC-fitted ones, which come with sounds and dialogue recordings taken from the film. Packs are expected to ship at approximately the same time as the general 'Ironclad' models.





Time to be out & about

After a long and very wet winter, the threat (or promise) of warmer weather, and the occasional appearance of the sunshine gives us all a lift... and especially so in the heritage railway sector, which depends of families taking trips out and about.

Visitors are the lifeblood of the movement, and although there are many things competing for your time and attention, we all know we love an escape, and there are few things better than a trip to a railway or museum.

You and your family will perhaps already have your favourite or regular attractions that you like to visit, so why not try something new and vary that destination? Look to add to your list of special destinations... a part of the country you may not have been to for a while, or an attraction on your doorstep you'd never really paid attention to.

All the venues and businesses on this page provide a memorable day out or help with that essential short break that often combines inspiration, entertainment and education.

You really can't beat a super day out with the family at one of the fabulous attractions highlighted on these pages, whether it's a regular service of a special gala, and while you're at it try some lovely locally-sourced food and hospitality.

Even better, you can always find some interesting byways and highways to and from any attraction, so it's a great opportunity to get off those busy motorways and explore the great British countryside.

As you can see from the map here, there are venues to visit across the country, so go on, support these top UK attractions... you will not be disappointed!

To feature on our next 'out and about' map contact Andy on 01507 529455 andy.bruce@kelsey.co.uk

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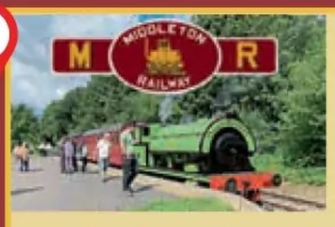

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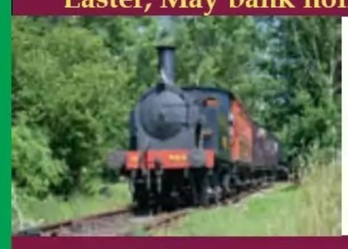

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MAKES EAST SOMERSET GALA ITS MOST SUCCESSFUL EVER

Two visiting firsts saw the East Somerset Railway attract record numbers to its March 14/15 spring gala weekend, with extra trains added at the end of the first day to ensure that everyone was able to travel, report **Martin Creese** and **Owen Hayward.**

BASED at Didcot Railway Centre and making its first visit away from home since 1990 was GWR AEC Railcar No. 22, one of the star attractions at the East Somerset Railway's spring gala weekend.

Built in 1940 as one of 38 examples of its type, just three GWR railcars survive, with the second, No. 20, currently approaching the end of an extensive restoration at the Kent & East Sussex Railway.

These railcars could once be found working over the Witham to Yatton line, which was often referred to as the Strawberry Line owing to its conveyance of the fruit from local growers to market and over part of which the ESR operates. The visit of No. 22, therefore, revived a sight that has not been seen in the region since the mid-20th century; archive pictures exist showing scrapped classmate No. 24 arriving at Cranmore with a GWR Churchward Toplight carriage in tow.

Also in attendance was GWR 5700 class 0-6-0PT No. 7754, which was making its first trip away from the Llangollen Railway since returning to steam in 2023, and which complimented the ESR's two current Western Region prairies, 4500 class No. 4555 (currently partway through a three-year loan from the Dartmouth Steam Railway and which is making a reciprocal visit to appear at the LR's own April 10-12 branch line gala) and 5101 class No. 4110 (also on loan from the DSR).

Advanced booking allocation for the gala saw the Saturday sell out in advance; although there were still tickets available on the day, the railway advised potential visitors to consider visiting on the Sunday to avoid the crowds.

With the sun shining throughout, the railway was incredibly busy with more 1300 passengers visiting, making it the ESR's biggest and most successful event to date.

Such was the demand on services that two extra trips were added with No. 22 late on Saturday afternoon to allow as many people as possible the opportunity to experience a round trip.

In addition to the railcar's own trips, the trio of steam locomotives alternated on a Mk. 1 passenger rake as well as the occasional freight workings, while Andrew Barclay 0-4-0ST No. 1719 of 1920 *Lady Nan* offered short footplate experiences within the yard at Cranmore.

Charter days

The weekend prior to the gala, both the visitors starred in a day each of photographic sessions organised by 30742 Charters, with No. 22 being the focus on March 7 and No. 7754 featuring the following day.

ESR volunteer Brian Pike kindly joined the day as a re-enactor. He recalled travelling to school at Shepton Mallet from Cranmore, the morning journey by steam, but the return often aboard a GWR railcar which, with its full load of school pupils, climbed up the Mendips back to Cranmore a little slower than normal. The railcar's twin AEC engines produces quite a sound, especially when climbing the 1-in-56 from Mendip Vale.

Another of Brian's recollections was the railcar towing a Fruit D van to be loaded with

On its first trip away from Didcot Railway Centre since 1990, GWR AEC railcar No. 22 passes Cranmore signal box with a Fruit D in tow – a once common sight when the line regularly transported strawberries to market. The scene formed part of a photographic charter on a misty March 7. MARTIN CREESE

During a 30742 charter on March 8, No. 7754 runs through Cranmore station with a train of milk tankers, a sight made possible thanks to the support of photographers sponsoring the cost of transporting several of these vehicles to the ESR in 2023. MARTIN CREESE

Large prairie No. 4110 rounds the curve at Mendip Vale with a service to Cranmore during the spring gala on March 14. DON BISHOP

The two GWR prairies: No. 4555 (right) sits ready for its next duty at Cranmore, while No. 4110 waits for the road to be cleared to allow it into the platform with the freight train. ADAM ASHFORD

Resident Andrew Barclay 0-4-0ST No. 1719 of 1920 *Lady Nan* gave short footplate rides at Cranmore on March 15. LAURA STANDERWICK

strawberries. While it was a little too early in the year to add this fruit, the railway's recently restored Fruit D was attached for several runpasts.

For the days with the pannier, the locomotive was paired with a rake of five milk tankers which were brought from other railways to be together on the ESR a few years ago thanks to sponsorship by photographers. With the locomotive in Brunswick green but the water tanks carrying British Railways lettering in the GWR's font (applied during the transitional years after Nationalistion but carried only by a small number of locomotives), it made for quite a sight.

The two days of charters were beset by Mendip mizzle, which did at least make for some atmospheric images, and support for both was strong, bringing in some beneficial cash to the railway.

Following the gala, the star guests ran one more day each in service. March 21 saw the ESR host a mini diesel gala, with No. 22 running alongside Class 108 DMU No. L231, while one of the resident Sentinel shunting locomotives gave brake van rides at Cranmore station. No. 7754 then worked all services the next day, after which it returned home to Llangollen.

During the gala weekend, a fire was lit in the firebox for Ivatt 2MT 2-6-0 No. 46447 in readiness for testing. Owned by the Isle of Wight Steam Railway but too big for that line's requirements, it is on long-term loan to the ESR and is currently nearing the end of overhaul.

The boiler could be seen on a wagon in the locomotive yard and on March 16, it successfully passed its out-of-frames test, meaning it can now be lagged with insulation before the cladding is fitted.

The completion of this task will then enable the boiler to be returned to the frames, with hopes raised that it will be back in service later this year. HR

➜ Railcar No. 22's next stop on its tour will be the Gloucestershire Warwickshire Railway, as reported in News, page 38.

Pannier tank No. 7754 is prepared for service outside the shed at Cranmore on March 8. CALLUM WILLCOX

The setting sun shines on No. 22 as it heads away from Mendip Vale on March 14. ADAM ASHFORD

POPULAR PUGNEYS BACK ON TRACK!

Sally Clifford meets the team responsible for the resurrection and restoration of a much-loved West Yorkshire miniature railway after it sustained significant damage from thefts and vandal attacks last year.

More than two decades since its development, Wakefield's Pugneys Light Railway is continuing to bring enjoyment to generations.

Yet it was not until a spate of criminal damage to the 7¼in gauge miniature line last November and December, as reported in *Heritage Railway* issue 342, prompted a heart-wrenching Facebook post informing passengers of the necessity for a slight fare increase that Bob Brocklehurst realised just how much his miniature railway meant to the many visitors he and his volunteer team transport along the lakeside round-trip at Pugneys Country Park. "It brought a lump to our throats," said Bob.

On a rare blue-sky day in February, when I popped by to find out more about this railway which holds so many memories and is held with such affection, there was a steady flow of families waiting for and boarding the miniature over-scale steam locomotives for the journey ahead as we pulled into the station.

I had not anticipated being in the driving seat after meeting Bob at the locomotive shed, but I wasn't going to refuse his kind invitation to take the controls of *Brutus*, an American GP40 loco originally built for Bolebrook Castle in Sussex, which has since been re-engined from petrol to diesel and is mainly used for hauling the railway's works trains for the journey down.

On instruction, I tentatively moved the lever forward to send us on our way. Gently trundling along to keep within the 5mph limit, the reciprocal waves to passers-by who came into view gave a real sense of Bob and his team's purpose – to bring smiles to the faces of those who come to savour the tranquil and picturesque surroundings, where you can spot wildlife as you journey alongside the lake on this immensely pleasurable trip.

Interestingly, an abiding memory of Bob's – documented on a photograph on his mobile phone – was driving a 10¼in gauge A4 *Sir Nigel Gresley* in Thorseby Park during his youth in his native Nottinghamshire.

"I have always loved all things mechanical," he recalled. "I think steam is a fascination of the railway engine. I missed the steam era; growing up, it was all diesel, and I have never been a big diesel fan – it was always steam engines. I used to go to traction engine rallies."

School holidays were spent helping to build locos in a pal's workshop, yet after leaving school, Bob went briefly into engineering before spending the majority of his working life as a brewery technician.

Bob Brocklehurst with some of his Pugneys Light Railway fleet.

Change of path

It was the death of his first wife that prompted him to go to a model engineering society with a friend, and it was there that the railway interest he had since he was 10 years old was reignited.

In 2016, he spotted Pugneys Light Railway for sale on an internet marketplace and it proved to be an opportunity not to be missed. "Why not play trains?" said Bob, with a smile.

Since then, Bob and his team of 20 volunteers have continued to bring plenty of smiles to the many passengers who ride the rails.

Built by the late Jim Pinder in 1998, this railway was originally a 500-yard end-to-end track, extended to a 750-yard balloon loop in 1999.

Following Jim's death in 2013, the railway closed for several years before Bob took it on and, after carrying out restoration works, it reopened on Good Friday 2017 with the green Class 47 – one of the 11 locomotives in the railway's fleet – hauling the first coaches, which are christened after Bob's and the late Jim's family members.

Other working locomotives include two Exmoor Steam engines, *Sapphire* – Bob's favourite, bought for his 60th birthday – and *Jane*. "I had seen these Exmoors and thought they looked like the best commercially-built locomotives, and I have always gone for the best of everything," he said.

Joining them are *Peggy*, the smallest train on the railway, yet capable of hauling three coaches, and *Planet*, a handsome diesel. Both arrived in 2019 from a private railway in North

Pugneys Light Railway, located in Pugneys Country Park, Wakefield.

Pugneys Light Railway Lakeside station ready to welcome passengers.

Volunteers undertake tasks including ashing out and oiling *Sapphire*.

Volunteer Reece Ruckledge tinkers with *Peggy*, the smallest steam locomotive in the Pugneys fleet but which can easily haul a three-coach train.

The green Class 47 was the first to run when Pugneys Light Railway reopened in 2017.

Union Pacific No. 6643.

Bob Brocklehurst, second from left, with some of his team of volunteers.

Yorkshire. *Ivor*, owned by Bob's wife Sue and themed around the popular 1950s televison series Ivor the Engine, is a petrol-electric hybrid and was one of the first locomotives to arrive at the railway following its reopening; the blue Class 47 arrived from Grosvenor Park Miniature Railway at the same time as the green one, and the pair often run top-and-tail on busy days.

Among the more recent acquisitions are diesels *Grumbly*, which has been repainted and had a new engine installed since joining the railway in 2022 from Ruddington Miniature Railway; GP38, built in 1993 by Knightly Engineering (Roger Greatrex), another locomotive builder Bob says is renowned to be the best and which arrived in 2023; a Union Pacific-branded diesel No. 6643; and Scamps Nos. 38, 56, 60, 100 and 140, which are mainly used as tool trains for track maintenance.

"Everything here you can chuck a fire in or turn a key and start it," said Bob. "They are the type of locos that if you keep them oiled up, they run and run and run. There are the odd bits of maintenance, but we rebuild them into a state where they run for years."

Chatting with Bob and the team, their involvement with the railway is certainly a labour of love.

Seeing the younger volunteers helping to run the railway – the youngest during my visit is 13-year-old Noah – and tinkering with the engines is refreshing in a world where life is so often lived online.

For Noah, who has been volunteering at the railway for three years, the engines and the people bring the greatest enjoyment: "They are really nice engines, and I also like the people you meet while you are here."

Reece Ruckledge, who has been volunteering for 10 years and works as a points operator in the railway industry, enjoys the variety of roles at Pugneys. "Volunteering here, it is being quite open-minded to the many roles you can enjoy and do – you are not stuck to one job or one task," he said.

Volunteer passions

Demonstrating this, one volunteer is busily oiling and ashing out *Sapphire* as we spoke.

"You gain a variety of skills from a railway like here," added Reece.

Stuart has been a volunteer for more than a year. He is also a member of two model engineering clubs, where he runs his own locomotive.

"I am retired," he said, "which gives me the time to help out at all three venues. I particularly like Pugneys for the caring and supportive atmosphere. The staff have a wealth of railway knowledge and are more than willing to share. I enjoy being part of the railway community."

Bob said that without volunteers like these, then the railway wouldn't exist. "We have been lucky – we have some good volunteers, and we have some good people who are good with track work and things like that.

"I didn't envisage it being what it is today, but we put our heart and soul into it.

"I love the atmosphere, the smiling faces of people who come on... we don't just get children, we also get couples aged in their 70s and 80s who come and ride, and it is a nice environment. People enjoy themselves and the volunteers enjoy themselves. They get to drive some of the best steam engines out there, the best locos out there, and it is just a happy place to be." HR

➜ To find out more about this line, visit Pugneys Light Railway on Facebook or www.pugneyslightrailway.online

Steam Locos in Profile: Ffestiniog Festival

Eden Green Media (66 minutes, www.e-gmedia.co.uk, DVD £19.99, Blu-Ray £24.99).

EDITOR'S CHOICE

THE latest release in Chris Eden-Green's series comes in a slightly different format, **writes Owen Hayward**. Rather than a sequence of episodes covering individual classes, here he covers the England, Fairlie (single and double!) and Hunslet locomotives to not only give a look at their respective developments and history, but also to tell how their presence is interwoven with the story of the Ffestiniog Railway – both pre and post-preservation.

It is clear that, as with all his SLIPs programmes, this is a labour of love and that production has spanned a good number of years, as evidenced by footage of *Earl of Merioneth* in service – that locomotive has been out of service since 2018. A great deal of research has been done not just on the different designs as a whole, but the individual locomotives too. The information is a decent balance, detailed enough to keep the hardened enthusiasts interested while not being overwhelming for anyone who might be using the film as a stepping stone into railway preservation, or who is just keen to learn more about it all.

It could be all too easy to reuse shots and angles over and over again, but Chris's small film unit has explored several locations across not only the FR, but also the Welsh Highland Railway, so there is plenty of visual variety (and perhaps some inspiration for exploration during future photographic visits).

Also included on the disc is a bonus programme looking at the ubiquitous Quarry Hunslet locomotives. At a passing glance, it can be easy to think these are all the same when, really, beneath the surface there are many differences – some obvious, others much less so.

If you are not a narrow gauge enthusiast, then you might be surprised by just how much variety there is among these 0-4-0STs synonymous with Welsh slate mines and quarries. A tangible link between these two films is, of course, the Ffestiniog's pair of ex-Penrhyn main line locomotives, *Linda* and *Blanche*, which are now very different to how they were when built.

Chris's production has improved over the years, and it is also nice to hear some new ambient music being used. While the use of backing tracks in this manner can divide opinions, it can help emphasise a point and transform a montage of clips from being a basic sequence of shots of passing trains into something more meaningful which, to Chris's credit, is more suited to his style. A worthy watch for all levels of enthusiast.

WELL-RESEARCHED INSIGHT TO NARROW GAUGE ICONS

Diesel Decade Vol 1 – Scottish diesels between 1964 and 1974

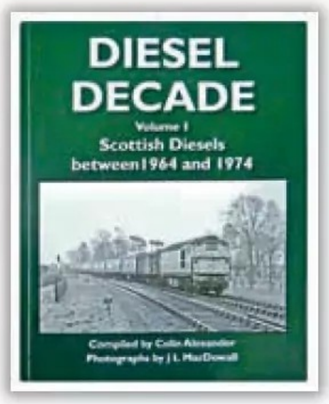
Compiled by Colin Alexander (softback, Transport Treasury Publishing, 112pp, £14.95 + £3 p&p, cheques payable to Transport Treasury Publishing and sent to: 16 Highworth Close, High Wycombe HP13 7PJ, ISBN 978-1-917776-30-1).

DIESELS? As a steam era trainspotter, not really my bag, **writes Geoff Courtney**. And from Scotland? Sadly, not the stuff of nostalgia or personal memories for a London-centric enthusiast. And a sea of diesel photographs, a form of railway motive power that aesthetically can't compare with the almost awe-inspiring sight of a main line steam locomotive hard at work? Forget it.

And so, armed with this unalloyed prejudice, I sat down to view what was on offer in this latest publication from the team at Transport Treasury.

Then I remembered the mighty Deltics, which to me were one of the wonders of the new order as I witnessed the dying days of steam.

Having experienced the eponymous prototype, which I travelled behind on a Grantham-Peterborough express on April 10, 1959 (30 minutes for the 29 miles, including a four-minute permanent way dead stop, and a maximum of 95mph according to my teenage timing), and which I also noted at Wood Green on September 15, 1960, on an Up Hull train, my first logs of the production members of what was to become the Class 55 were at Hadley Wood on July 8, 1961, comprising D9001 (later to be named *St. Paddy*), and D9004 (later *Queen's Own Highlander*), the former on an Edinburgh train and D9004 also en route to Scotland, with the 'Aberdonian.'



These locomotives engraved on my mind a sense of awe and admiration that remains to this day, and so I was delighted to see this book devoted a number of pages to them, with images of D9000, D9005, D9006, D9010, D9014, D9015 and D9020 included.

Fortified by this pictorial nostalgia, I waded into this new publication with renewed enthusiasm and thoroughly enjoyed the pot-pourri of types one, two, three, four and 100mph locomotives, and I also learned of one nickname that was new to me –'duffs' for the Class 47 Co-Co diesels. Were they really that unreliable?

The book's photographs were the work of Les MacDowall, and perhaps his most eye-catching image was a two-page spread of Class 27 D5377 hauling a real assortment of wagons, even including an ex-Southern Railway van, against a soaring vertiginous backcloth 1000ft above sea level near County March summit north of Tyndrum on the Fort William-Crianlarich line.

Heady stuff indeed.

DIESEL IMAGES AND SCOTTISH SPLENDOUR

The Railway that Horncastle Built

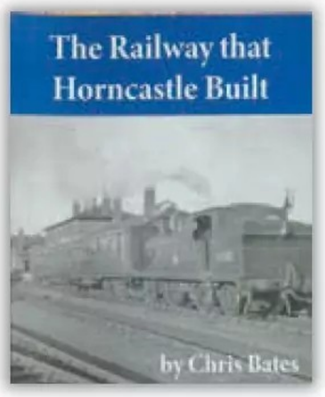
By Chris Bates (softback, Horncastle History & Heritage Society, www.horncastleciv.org.uk 74pp, £10, ISBN 978 1 80605 405 3).

RAILWAYS were essentially a backbone of the towns they were built to serve, even though many disappeared from their landscapes decades ago. The coming of the railways revolutionised industrial and agricultural economies alike and radically changed the settlement patterns of centuries-old communities.

This volume highlights a classic case of a flourishing Lincolnshire market town which was not served by its branch line until 1854, well after the peak of the Railway Mania. After the railway arrived at the town, it quickly replaced the Horncastle Canal as the preferred means of bulk transport, and which had accordingly boosted the town's fortunes when it opened in 1802. The railway led to the prices of coal and other essential goods dropping, and opened the door for townsfolk to take cheap excursions further afield. The canal closed in 1878, and the increase in buses and car ownership saw Horncastle lose its passenger services in 1954, goods lasting until 1971.

By then, the former presence of the railway had made its lasting mark on the development of the town we know today.

This splendidly -esearched and presented volume is an essential read not only for those who want to be informed about this town's past in context of its shaping, but it is also a classic blueprint for authors of similar books on any settlement, anywhere, to follow. Packed with essential information, it places the branch in the wider context of other local railways, some of which were never built, and is illustrated with previously unpublished pictures of its operating years and ephemera. The volume includes several fascinating stories such as that of the two unusual Horncastle branch carriages and the local legend that a narrow gauge 'train' that once served a brickworks is buried under the Railway Hotel in North Street.



While Horncastle station is now demolished, the book follows the course of the line today, and also acknowledges the present-day railway presence in the town – for *Heritage Railway* has been published there for the past 25 years!

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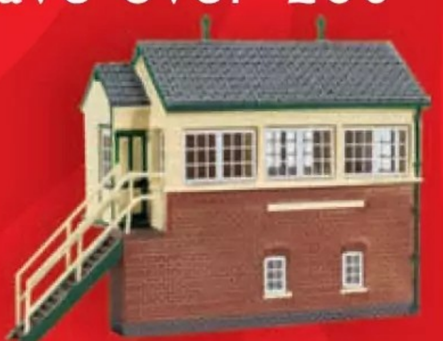

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SOUTH EAST

Amberley Museum
2ft gauge, ¼ mile. Arundel, West Sussex. Tel: 01798 831370. **Open: Weds-Suns.**

Bluebell Railway
Standard gauge, 11 miles. Sheffield Park, East Sussex TN22 2QL. Tel: 01825 720800.
Running: Tues-Thurs, W/Es, bank hols.

Bredgar & Wormshill Light Railway
2ft gauge, ½ mile. Bredgar, Sittingbourne, Kent. Tel: 01622 884254.
Running: Weds + Apr 10, 16/17, May 3.

Chatham Historic Dockyard
Standard gauge, one mile. Chatham, Kent. Tel: 01634 820800.
Open: Daily until Sept 6.

East Kent Railway
Standard gauge, two miles. Shepherdswell, Kent. Tel: 01304 832042.
Running: Suns.

Eastleigh Lakeside Railway
10¼in & 7¼in gauge, 1¼ miles.
Running: W/Es, sch hols. Daily from May 25

Exbury Gardens & Steam Railway
12¼in gauge, 1½ miles. Exbury, Southampton. Tel: 023 8089 1203.
Open: Daily.

Hayling Light Railway
2ft gauge, one mile. Hayling Island, Hants. Tel: 07902 446340.
Running: Weds, W/Es, sch hols.

Hollycombe Steam in the Country
2ft gauge, 1½ miles. Liphook, Hants. Tel: 01428 724900.
Open: Suns from Apr 26 + May 4, 16.

Isle of Wight Steam Railway
Standard gauge, five miles. Havenstreet, Isle of Wight. Tel: 01983 882204.
Running: Tues, Thurs (from Apr 16), Sats (from May 2) Suns and sch hols.

Kent & East Sussex Railway
Standard gauge, 10½ miles. Tenterden, Kent. Tel: 01580 765155.
Running: Tues, Weds, W/Es sch hols.

Lavender Line
Standard gauge, one mile. Isfield, East Sussex. Tel: 01825 750515.
Running: Apr 19, May 3/4, 24/25, June 7.

Mid-Hants Railway
Standard gauge, 10 miles. Alresford, Hants SO24 9JG. Tel: 01962 733810.
Running: Weds, Thurs, W/Es, bank hols.

Mizens Railway
7¼in gauge, one mile. Woking, Surrey. Tel: 07962 400922.
Running: Suns from May 3.

Old Kiln Light Railway
2ft gauge, ¾ mile. Farnham, Surrey.
Running: W/Es and bank hols.

Romney, Hythe & Dymchurch Railway
15in gauge, 13½ miles. New Romney, Kent. Tel: 01797 362353.
Running: Daily.

Royal Victoria Railway
10¼in gauge, one mile. Netley, Southampton. Tel: 02380 456246.
Running: W/Es, sch hols.

Sittingbourne & Kemsley Light Railway
2ft 6in gauge, 1¾ miles. Sittingbourne, Kent. Tel: 01795 424899.
Running: Apr 19.

Spa Valley Railway
Standard gauge, five miles. Tunbridge Wells, Kent. Tel: 01892 300141.
Running: W/Es, bank hols + Apr 8/9, 15/16.

Volk's Electric Railway
2ft 8½in gauge, one mile. Brighton.
Running: Daily until Sept 30.

SOUTH WEST

Avon Valley Railway
Standard gauge, three miles. Bitton, Bristol. Tel: 0117 932 5538.
Running: Sats (until May 2), Suns, bank hols + May 16, 27, 30.

Bodmin Railway
Standard gauge, 6½ miles, Bodmin, Cornwall. Tel: 01208 73555.
Running: Tues-Thurs, Suns bank hols + Apr 18, 25, May 23.

Bristol Harbour Railway
Standard gauge, 1½ miles. Princes Wharf, Bristol. Tel: 0117 352 6600.
M Shed Museum open Tues-Suns.
Running: Apr 18/19, May 2-4, 16/17.

Dartmouth Steam Railway
Standard gauge, seven miles. Paignton, Devon. Tel: 01803 555872.
Running: Daily.

Devon Railway Centre
2ft gauge, ½ mile. Bickleigh, Devon. Tel: 01884 855671.
Open: W/Es, sch hols and bank hols.

East Somerset Railway
Standard gauge, two miles. Cranmore, Somerset. Tel: 01749 880417.
Running: W/Es, bank hols + Weds (from May 6) & Thurs (from June 4).

Gartell Light Railway
2ft gauge, one mile. Yenston, Templecombe, Somerset. Tel: 01963 370752.
Running: May 31.

Helston Railway
Standard gauge, 1¼ miles. Helston, Cornwall. Tel: 07901 977 597.
Running: Thurs, Suns, and bank hols.

Lappa Valley Railway
7¼in, 10¼ and 15in gauge, one mile. Newquay, Cornwall. Tel: 01872 510317.
Open: Weds, Thurs, W/Es, sch hols.

Launceston Steam Railway
1ft 11½in gauge, 2 ½ miles. Launceston, Cornwall. Tel: 01566 775665
Running: Apr 12-14. Suns-Tues from May 24 + May 27-29

Lynton & Barnstaple Railway
2ft gauge, one mile. Woody Bay, North Devon. Tel: 01598 763487.
Running: Tues, Weds, W/Es, bank hols.

Moors Valley Railway
7¼in gauge, one mile. Ringwood, Hants. Tel: 01425 471415.
Running: W/Es, sch hols.

North Dorset Railway
Standard gauge, 1200ft. Shillingstone, Blandford Forum, Dorset. Tel: 01258 860696.
Open: Weds, W/Es.

Plym Valley Railway
Standard gauge, 1½ miles. Marsh Mills, Plymouth. Tel: 01752 345078.
Running: Suns + Apr 11, 25, May 9, 23.

Seaton Tramway
2ft 9in gauge, three miles. Harbour Road, Seaton, Devon. Tel: 01297 20375.
Running: Daily.

Somerset & Dorset Railway
Standard gauge, ½ mile. Midsomer Norton station, Silver Street, BA3 2EY. Tel: 01761 411221 **Open: Suns, bank hols.**
Running: Apr 12, 15, 26, May 3/4, 17, 24, 25.

South Devon Railway
Standard gauge, seven miles. Buckfastleigh, Devon. Tel: 01364 644370.
Running: Tues-Suns, sch hols.
Daily from May 1

Swanage Railway
Standard gauge, six miles. Swanage, Dorset. Tel: 01929 425800.
Running: Daily.

Swindon & Cricklade Railway
Standard gauge, three miles. Blunsdon, Wiltshire. Tel: 01793 771615.
Running: Apr 12, May 2-4, 23-25.

West Somerset Railway
Standard gauge, 20 miles. Minehead, Somerset. Tel: 01643 704996.
Running: Tues, Weds, Thurs (from May 12), W/Es & bank hols.

Yeovil Railway Centre
Standard gauge, ¾ mile. Yeovil Junction station, Somerset. Tel: 01935 410420.
Open: Suns.
Running: Apr 19, May 10, 23/24.

EAST ANGLIA

Bressingham Steam Museum
Narrow and standard gauge, one mile. Diss, Norfolk. Tel: 01379 686900.
Running: Weds-Suns, bank hols, sch hols.

Bure Valley Railway
15in gauge, nine miles. Aylsham, Norfolk. Tel: 01263 733858.
Running: Daily until Nov 1.

Colne Valley Railway
Standard gauge, ¾ mile. Castle Hedingham, Essex. Tel: 01787 461174.
Running: Suns + May 2, 23, 25, 27/28.

East Anglian Railway Museum
Standard gauge, ¼ mile. Wakes Colne, Essex. Tel: 01206 242524.
Open: Weds, W/Es.
Running: Apr 12, May 3/4, 24/25, 27.

Ferry Meadows Railway
10¼in gauge, ½ mile. Peterborough, Cambs. Tel: 01733 398 889.
Running: W/Es, sch hols.

Tickets for Santa specials at the Llangollen Railway have gone on sale earlier than ever before following a hugely successful festive seasonin 2025. LR

Too early for Christmas? Llangollen announces festive tickets now on sale!

IT may only be early spring, but Christmas has arrived nine months early on the Llangollen Railway in the wake of its hugely successful festive season last year when every Santa special seat sold.

The railway has unveiled its plans for an even bigger, brighter and more magical festive season, with more trains and more experiences, and tickets going on sale earlier than ever before.

Prices have been frozen for 2026, and for the first time, families can now add optional ticket refund protection when booking, allowing them to recover 100% of the ticket price if plans change.

Santa will travel on board the train before settling into his grotto at Lapland in Carrog, where families can enjoy a special meet and greet, take photographs, and share a magical festive moment together. Each child will also receive a high-quality age-appropriate present.

Tickets are also available for the line's popular Sion Corn Welsh Language Christmas Experiences and its mince pie specials.

Tickets for all festive services can be bought now at https://llan.hops.org.uk/tickets/santa-specials1

Pre-order Issue 345: Order your copy from **mrtns.uk/pre-order-hr** or call **01507 529529**.

Mangapps Railway Museum
Standard gauge, ¾ mile.
Near Burnham-on-Crouch, Essex.
Tel: 01621 784898.
Open: W/Es, sch hols.

Mid-Norfolk Railway
Standard gauge, 11½ miles. Dereham, Norfolk. Tel: 01362 851723.
Running: W/Es, bank hols + May 6, 13.

Mid-Suffolk Light Railway
Standard gauge, ½ mile.
Brockford, Suffolk. Tel: 01449 766899.
Running: May 3/4, 24/25, 31.

Nene Valley Railway
Standard gauge, 7½ miles.
Wansford, Peterborough, Cambs.
Tel: 01780 784444.
Running: W/Es, bank hols.

North Norfolk Railway
Standard gauge, 5½ miles.
Sheringham, Norfolk, NR26 8RA.
Tel: 01263 820800.
Running: W/Es, sch hols, bank hols + Tues-Thurs from Apr 21.

Wells & Walsingham Railway
10¼in gauge, four miles.
Wells-next-the-Sea, Norfolk.
Tel: 01328 711630.
Running: daily.

Whitwell & Reepham Railway
Standard gauge, ¼ mile. Reepham, Norfolk.
Tel: 01603 871694.
Open: Tues-Suns. Running: W/Es.

Drive the unique autocar along the Moorsline!

THIS season's footplate and driver experiences on the North Yorkshire Moors Railway will include the chance to take the controls of the unique visiting NER Autocar for the first time.

For 2026, the NYMR will offer steam footplate experiences for £475 per person and diesel footplate experiences from £300. At the start of the season, a new, shorter mixed-traction experience for £300 per person, between Pickering and Goathland, is also available.

Running on selected dates throughout the main season, each experience will include access to the locomotive footplate during the journey, a lunch voucher for the tearoom, a 10% discount voucher for the station shop, and a commemorative certificate.

The driver experiences cost between £650-£850 per person. A companion ticket is also available for £30, allowing a friend or family member to travel on the same train.

The 1903-built NER petrol-electric autocar, which was restored by Stephen Middleton and is based at the Embsay & Bolton Abbey Steam Railway, can be booked for a driver experience, giving participants a unique day out at the controls of a fascinating piece of engineering history. With limited places available, early booking is recommended by visiting www.nymr.co.uk/footplate

NYMR's director of mechanical engineering, Paul 'Piglet' Middleton, said: "Standing on the footplate of a working locomotive is something many railway enthusiasts dream about. Our footplate experiences put people right at the heart of the action, alongside the crew as they fire, drive and manage these historic locomotives across the North York Moors. It gives people a real appreciation for the skill and teamwork needed to operate a heritage railway."

Driver experience courses are being offered about NER autocar No. 3137 at the North Yorkshire Moors Railway this year. NEIL NORMAN/NYMR

HOME COUNTIES

Buckinghamshire Railway Centre
Standard gauge, ¼ mile. Quainton Road, Bucks. Tel: 01296 655720
Cafe open Mon-Fri. Museum: Suns.
Running: Apr 12, May 24/25, 31.

Chinnor & Princes Risborough Railway
Standard gauge, 3½ miles.
Chinnor, Oxon. Tel: 07979 055366
Running: Suns, bank hols + May 2, 23, 25.

Cholsey & Wallingford Railway
Standard gauge, 2½ miles.
Wallingford, Oxon. Tel: 01491 835067
Running: Apr 11, May 3/4, 9.

Didcot Railway Centre
Standard gauge. Didcot, Oxon.
Tel: 01235 817200.
Open: Weds, W/Es bank hols.
Running: Weds, W/Es, bank hols.

Epping Ongar Railway
Standard gauge, six miles.
Ongar, Essex.
Tel: 01277 365200.
Running: W/Es & bank hols + Apr 17.

Great Whipsnade Railway
2ft 6in gauge.
Whipsnade Zoo, Dunstable.
Tel: 0344 225 1826.
Running: daily from Mar 28.

Hampton & Kempton Waterworks Railway
2ft gauge.
Hanworth, Middlesex.
Tel: 01932 212235.
Running: Suns + Mar 21, Apr 4, 18.

Leighton Buzzard Railway
2ft gauge, three miles.
Leighton Buzzard, Beds.
Tel: 01525 373888
Running: Suns, bank hols.

London Museum of Water & Steam
2ft gauge, 400 yards. Brentford, London.
Tel: 0208 568 4757. **Open: Thurs-Suns.**

MIDLANDS

Abbey Pumping Station
2ft gauge, ¼ mile. Corporation Road, Leicester, LE4 5PX.
Tel: 0116 299 5111.
Running: May 17, 26.

Amerton Railway
2ft gauge, one mile. Stowe-by-Chartley, Staffs. Tel: 01889 271337.
Running: W/Es and bank.

Apedale Valley Railway
2ft gauge, ½ mile. Apedale, Newcastle-under-Lyme, Staffs.
Tel: 0845 094 1953.
Running: W/Es, bank hols.

Barrow Hill Roundhouse
Standard gauge.
Barrow Hill, near Chesterfield.
Tel: 01246 475554.
Open: W/Es.

Battlefield Line
Standard gauge, five miles.
Shackerstone, Leics.
Tel: 01827 880754.
Running: W/Es, bank hols + May 26/27.

Cambrian Heritage Railways
Standard gauge, 1¾ miles (Oswestry), ¾ mile (Llynclys).
Oswestry and Llynclys, Shropshire.
Tel: 01691 728131.
Running: Weds, W/Es & bank hols from May 2.

Chasewater Railway
Standard gauge, two miles. Walsall, West Midlands. Tel: 01543 452623.
Open: Daily. Running: W/Es + May 4, 28.

Railway museums

Beamish
County Durham. The Living Museum of the North. Open: Daily until Oct 23.
Tel: 0191 370 4000.

Blythburgh Station
Suffolk, off A12 in Blythburgh.
Open: Tuesdays 07379 789665

Coleford GWR Museum
Coleford, Gloucestershire. Open: Fris and Sats. Tel: 01594 832032/833569.

Colonel Stephens Railway Museum
Tenterden, Kent.
Open when KESR trains are running.
Tel: 01732 809143

Crewe Heritage Centre
Vernon Way, Crewe. Open: W/Es & bank hols. Tel: 01270 212130.

Hopetown Darlington
North Road Station, Darlington.
Open: Tues-Sun in term time, daily in school holidays. Tel: 01325 405060.

Leeds Industrial Museum
Armley Mills, Leeds. Open: Tues-Suns.
Tel: 0113 378 2097.

Locomotion: The National Railway Museum, Shildon
Co Durham. Open: Daily. Tel: 033 0058 0058.

London Transport Museum
Covent Garden. Open: Daily.
Tel: 0343 222 5000.

Manchester Museum of Science & Industry
Castlefield, Manchester. Open: Weds-Suns in term time, daily in school holidays. Tel: 033 0058 0058.

National Railway Museum
Leeman Road, York. Open: Daily.
Tel: 033 0058 0058.

Rail Story
Ingrow, West Yorks.
Open: Tues-Suns in term time, daily in school holidays.
Tel: 01535 690739 or 01535 680425.

Railworld Wildlife Haven
Peterborough.
Open: Weds, W/Es and school holidays.
Tel: 01733 344420.

Riverside Museum
Glasgow.
Open: Daily. Tel: 0141 287 2720.

Southwold Narrow Gauge Railway
Southwold, Suffolk. Open: May 3, 17, 24.

STEAM – Museum of the GWR
Swindon. Open: Daily.
Tel: 01793 466637.

Tiverton Museum
Tiverton, Devon.
Open: Thurs-Sats.
Tel: 01884 256295.

West Cumberland Railway Museum
St Bees, Cumbria.
Open one week per month or by appointment for special interest groups.
To arrange, contact petergrooke@btinternet.com

Ulster Folk & Transport Museum
Cultra, Co. Down.
Open: Tues-Suns.
Tel: +44 (0)28 9042 8428.

Churnet Valley Railway
Standard gauge, 11 miles. Cheddleton, Staffs. Tel: 01538 360522.
Running: Weds, W/Es, bank hols.

Dean Forest Railway
Standard gauge, 4½ miles. Norchard, Lydney, Glos. Tel: 01594 845840.
Running: Weds, W/Es, bank hols.

Ecclesbourne Valley Railway
Standard gauge, nine miles. Wirksworth, Derbyshire. Tel: 01629 823076.
Running: W/Es, bank hols.

Echills Wood Railway
7¼in gauge, 1¼ miles. Kingsbury Water Park, Sutton Coldfield.
Running: Suns.

Foxfield Railway
Standard gauge, 5½ miles.
Blythe Bridge, Staffs. Tel: 01782 396210.
Running: Suns + May 4.

Gloucestershire Warwickshire Railway
Standard gauge, 15 miles.
Toddington, Glos. Tel: 01242 621405.
Running: Tues-Thurs, W/Es, bank hols.

Great Central Railway
Standard gauge, eight miles.
Loughborough, Leics LE11 1RW.
Tel: 01509 632323.
www.gcrailway.co.uk
Running: W/Es, bank hols + Apr 24.

Great Central Railway (Nottingham)
Standard gauge, 10 miles.
Ruddington, Notts. Tel: 0115 940 5705.
Open: W/Es.
Running: Apr 12, May 16/17, 23-25.

Midland Railway – Butterley
Standard gauge, 3½ miles. Ripley, Derbyshire.
Tel: 01773 570140.
Running: W/Es & bank hols.

National Tramway Museum
Standard gauge, one mile.
Crich, Derbyshire. Tel: 01773 854 321
Open: Sats-Thurs, sch hols.

Northampton & Lamport Railway
Standard gauge, two miles.
Pitsford, Northants.
Tel: 01604 820327.
Running: Apr 12, 26, May 3/4, 10, 24/25.

Northamptonshire Ironstone Railway
Standard gauge, 1½ miles. Hunsbury Hill, Northampton. Tel: 01604 702031.
Running: Apr 19, May 3/4, 24/25.

Peak Rail
Standard gauge, four miles. Matlock, Derbyshire. Tel: 01629 580381.
Running: W/Es, bank hols + May 6, 20.

Perrygrove Railway
15in gauge. B4228, Coleford, Gloucestershire. Tel: 01594 834991.
Open: Tues, W/Es.

Rocks by Rail
Standard gauge, ¼ mile. Cottesmore, Rutland. Tel: 07974 171068.
Open: Tues & Thurs.
Running: Apr 19, May 3/4, 17, 24/25.

Rudyard Lake Railway
10¼in gauge, 1½ miles. Leek, Staffs.
Tel: 01538 269948.
Running: W/Es, sch hols.

Rushden Transport Museum & Railway
Standard gauge, ½ mile. Rushden, Northants. Tel 0300 3023 150.
Running: Apr 25/26.

Severn Valley Railway
Standard gauge, 16 miles. Kidderminster, Worcs DY10 1QR.
Tel: 01562 757900.
Running: Weds, Thurs, W/Es, sch hols, bank hols.

Statfold Country Park
Multiple gauges, one mile. Tamworth, Staffs B79 0BU. Tel: 01827 830389.
Open: Fris-Suns, sch hols.

Tanat Valley Light Railway
Standard gauge, 1½ miles. Nantmawr, Shropshire SY10 9HW.
Tel: 01691 780042.
www.tanatvalleyrailway.co.uk
Open: TBA.

Telford Steam Railway
Standard gauge, one mile. Telford, Shropshire.
Running: Suns & bank hols.

Toddington Narrow Gauge Railway
2ft gauge, ½ mile. Gloucestershire Warwickshire Railway, Toddington.
Running: Apr 11/12, 26, May 3/4, 23-25.

Valley Railway Adventure
15in gauge, 1¼ miles. A46 north of Evesham, Worcs. Tel: 01386 422282.
Running: W/Es, sch hols.

NORTH WEST

Blackpool Heritage Depot & Tram Tours
Standard gauge, 11 miles.
Blackpool, Lancs. Tel: 01253 209521.
www.blackpoolheritage.com
Promenade & depot tours: TBA.

Douglas Bay Horse Tramway
3ft gauge, 1 ½ miles. Douglas, Isle of Man.
Tel: 01624 697473.
Running: Weds-Mons, sch hols.

East Lancashire Railway
Standard gauge, 12 miles. Bury, Lancs.
Tel: 0333 320 2830.
Running: W/Es, bank hols + Apr 15-17.

Eden Valley Railway
Standard gauge, 2½ miles.
Warcop, Cumbria. Tel: 01768 342309.
Running: Suns & bank hols.

Great Laxey Mine Railway
19in gauge, ¼ mile. Laxey, Isle of Man.
Tel: 01624 862007/670386.
Running: Sats.

Groudle Glen Railway
2ft gauge, ¾ mile. Isle of Man.
Tel: 01624 670453.
Running: Suns from May 3.

Heaton Park Tramway
Standard gauge, ½ mile.
Manchester. Tel: 0161 740 1919.
Running: TBA.

Isle of Man Steam Railway
3ft gauge, 15½ miles. Douglas, Isle of Man.
Tel: 01624 662525.
Running: Thurs-Mons & sch hols.

Kirkby Stephen East
Standard gauge, ½ mile. Kirkby Stephen, Cumbria. Tel: 01768 371700.
Open: W/Es.

Lakeside & Haverthwaite Railway
Standard gauge, 3½ miles.
Near Ulverston, Cumbria. Tel: 01539 531594.
Running: Daily.

Manx Electric Railway
3ft gauge, 17 miles (MER).
Douglas, Isle of Man. Tel: 01624 697473.
Running: Daily.

Ravenglass & Eskdale Railway
15in gauge, seven miles. Ravenglass, Cumbria. Tel: 01229 717171.
Running: Daily.

Ribble Steam Railway
Standard gauge, 1½ miles.
Preston, Lancs. Tel: 01772 728800.
Running: Sats & bank hols.

Snaefell Mountain Railway
3ft gauge, 5½ miles (SMR).
Laxey, Isle of Man.
Tel: 01624 697473.
Running: Daily.

South Tynedale Railway
2ft gauge, 4¾ miles. Alston, Cumbria.
Tel: 01434 338212.
Running: W/Es & bank hols.

Threlkeld Quarry & Mining Museum
2ft gauge, ½ mile. Threlkeld, Cumbria.
Tel: 01768 779747.
Open: Tues-Suns & sch hols.

West Lancashire Light Railway
2ft gauge. Hesketh Bank, Lancs.
Tel: 01772 815881.
Running: Suns & bank hols.

NORTH EAST

Aln Valley Railway
Standard gauge, 1½ miles. Alnwick, Northumberland. Tel: 0300 030 3311.
Running: W/Es & bank hols from Apr 25.

Appleby Frodingham Railway-Scunthorpe
Standard gauge, 15 miles.
British Steel Steelworks, Scunthorpe.
Tel: 07889 297271.
Running: Apr 18, May 2, 23, 30.

Bowes Railway
Standard gauge, 1¾ miles. Springwell, Tyne & Wear. Tel: 07850 916484.
Open: Tues & Thurs to pre-booked groups only.

Cleethorpes Coast Light Railway
15in gauge, two miles.
Cleethorpes, North East Lincolnshire.
Tel: 01472 604657.
Running: Daily until Nov 1.

Derwent Valley Light Railway
Standard gauge, ½ mile. Murton, near York. Tel: 01904 489966.
Running: Suns, bank hols.

Embsay & Bolton Abbey Steam Railway
Standard gauge, five miles.
Embsay, North Yorks. Tel: 01756 710614.
Running: Tues, Weds W/Es, bank hols.

Heatherslaw Light Railway
15in gauge, two miles. Ford Forge, Northumberland. Tel: 01890 820244.
Running: Daily until Nov 1.

Keighley & Worth Valley Railway
Standard gauge, five miles.
Haworth, West Yorks, BD22 8NJ.
Tel: 01535 645214.
Running: Weds, W/Es, sch + bank hols.

Lincolnshire Coast Light Railway
2ft gauge. Skegness, Lincs. Tel: 07407 500884. **Running: May 23, 27.**

Lincolnshire Wolds Railway
Standard gauge, 1½ miles.
Ludborough, Lincolnshire.
Tel: 01507 363881.
Running: Apr 11/12, 19, May 3/4, 10.

Middleton Railway
Standard gauge, 1½ miles.
Hunslet, Leeds. Tel: 0845 680 1758.
Running: W/Es & bank hols.

North Yorkshire Moors Railway
Standard gauge, 18 miles.
Grosmont, North Yorks.
Tel: 01751 472508.
Running: Sats-Weds.

Kerr Stuart 'Wren' 0-4-0ST No. 3128 *Roger* will be spending the year on loan to the Mountsorrel Heritage Centre in Leicestershire, bringing steam back to the museum's 2ft gauge line. Usually resident at the Statfold Barn Railway, it will share duties with Ruston & Hornsby 4WDM No. 85049 *Malcolm*, while Andrew Barclay 0-4-0ST No. 1223 *Colin McAndrew* will return to service on the standard gauge line following recent repairs at Loughborough. MHC

The details in this list were correct at the time of going to press. We strongly advise that you confirm details with the venue concerned. Pre-booking is often essential.

TBA = To Be Announced

Pre-order Issue 345: Order your copy from **mrtns.uk/pre-order-hr** or call **01507 529529**.

Scarborough North Bay Railway
20in gauge, 7/8 mile. Scarborough, North Yorks. Tel: 01723 368791.
Running: W/Es, sch hols.

Stephenson Steam Railway
Standard gauge, two miles. North Shields. Tel: 0191 277 7135.
Running: Apr 16, May 4, 25, 28.

Tanfield Railway
Standard gauge, three miles. Near Gateshead, Tyne & Wear. Tel: 07508 092365.
Running: Suns, bank hols + May 23.

Weardale Railway
Standard gauge, 18 miles. Stanhope, Co. Durham. Tel: 07729 765504.
Running: Apr 12, 18/19, 25/26, May 2, 4.

Wensleydale Railway
Standard gauge, 22 miles. Leeming Bar, North Yorkshire. Tel: 01677 425805.
Running: Weds, W/Es, bank hols.

Whistlestop Valley Railway (Kirklees)
15in gauge, four miles. Huddersfield, West Yorks. Tel: 01484 865727.
Running: Fris, Sats, sch hols + May 3.

Yorkshire Wolds Railway
Standard gauge, 1,000ft. Fimber, East Yorkshire. Tel: 01377 338053.
Running: Suns & bank hols.

WALES

Bala Lake Railway
2ft gauge, 4½ miles. Llanuwchllyn, Gwynedd. Tel: 01678 540666.
Running: Tues-Thurs, W/Es, bank hols.

Blaenavon's Heritage Railway
Standard gauge, 3½ miles. Blaenavon, Torfaen. Tel: 01495 792263.
Running: W/Es, bank hols + May 5, 26.

Brecon Mountain Railway
1ft 11¾in gauge, five miles. Pant, Mid-Glamorgan. Tel: 01685 722988.
Running: Tues-Thurs, W/Es, bank hols.

Corris Railway
2ft 3in gauge, ¾ mile. Corris, near Machynlleth. Tel: 01654 761701.
Running: May 2-4, 23-25, 30/31.

Fairbourne Railway
12¼in gauge, two miles. Fairbourne, Gwynedd. Tel: 01341 250362.
Running: Tues-Thurs, W/Es, sch hols.

Ffestiniog Railway
2ft gauge, 13½ miles. Porthmadog, Gwynedd. Tel: 01766 516000.
Running: Daily.

Gwili Railway
Standard gauge, four miles. Bronwydd Arms, Carmarthenshire. Tel: 01267 238213.
Running: Weds, Thurs, Suns.

Llanberis Lake Railway
2ft gauge, three miles. Llanberis, Gwynedd. Tel: 01286 870549.
Running: Daily until May 10, then Tues-Thurs, W/Es & sch hols.

Llanelli & Mynydd Mawr Railway
Standard gauge, ¼ mile. Cynheidre, Carmarthenshire. Tel: 07956 082305.
Running: May 2, June 20.

Llangollen Railway
Standard gauge, 10 miles. Llangollen, Denbighshire. Tel: 01978 860979.
Running: Weds (+ Thurs & Fris from May 7), W/Es, bank hols.

Rhyl Miniature Railway
15in gauge. Rhyl, North Wales. Tel: 01352 759109.
Running: W/Es, bank hols, sch hols.

Snowdon Mountain Railway
800mm gauge, 4½ miles. Llanberis, Gwynedd. Tel: 01286 870223.
Running: Daily.

Talyllyn Railway
2ft 3in gauge, 7½ miles. Tywyn, Gwynedd. Tel: 01654 710472.
Running: Daily.

Teifi Valley Railway
2ft gauge, ½ mile. Henllan, Ceredigion, SA44 5TD. Tel: 01559 371077.
Running: TBA.

Vale of Rheidol Railway
1ft 11¾in gauge, 12 miles. Aberystwyth, Ceredigion. Tel: 01970 625819.
Running: Daily.

Welsh Highland Heritage Railway
2ft gauge, one mile. Porthmadog, Gwynedd. Tel: 01766 513402.
Running: Weds, Thurs, W/Es.

Welsh Highland Railway
2ft gauge, 26 miles. Caernarfon, Gwynedd. Tel: 01766 516000.
Running: Daily.

Welshpool & Llanfair Light Railway
2ft 6in gauge, eight miles. Llanfair Caereinion, Powys. Tel: 01938 810441.
Running: Weds, Thurs, W/Es, bank hols.

SCOTLAND

Bo'ness & Kinneil Railway
Standard gauge, five miles. Bo'ness, West Lothian. Tel: 01506 825855.
Running: Tues, W/Es & bank hols.

Caledonian Railway
Standard gauge, four miles. Brechin, Angus. Tel: 01356 622992.
Running: Apr 18, May 9.

Doon Valley Railway
Standard gauge. Dunaskin, Ayrshire.
Running: May 3, June 21.

Keith & Dufftown Railway
Standard gauge, 11 miles. Dufftown, Banffshire. Tel: 01340 821181.
Running: W/Es + May 1, 27.

Lathalmond Railway Museum
Standard gauge, ½ mile. Scottish Vintage Bus Museum, Lathalmond, near Dunfermline. Tel: 07379 914801.
Open: Suns. Running: Apr 19, May 17.

Leadhills & Wanlockhead Railway
2ft gauge, ¾ mile. Leadhills, South Lanarkshire. **Running: TBA.**

Royal Deeside Railway
Standard gauge, 1¼ miles. Banchory, Kincardineshire. Tel: 01330 844416.
Running: Apr 12, May 3, 31.

Strathspey Railway
Standard gauge, 10 miles. Aviemore, Inverness-shire. Tel: 01479 810725.
Running: Sats-Thurs + Apr 17.

IRELAND

Cavan and Leitrim Railway
3ft gauge. Dromod, Co. Leitrim. Tel: +353 71 963 8599.
Running: Suns.

Downpatrick & County Down Railway
5ft 3in gauge. Downpatrick, Co. Down. Tel: 028 4461 5779.
Running: Apr 11, May 2.

Railway Preservation Society of Ireland
5ft 3in gauge. Whitehead, Co. Antrim. Tel: +44 28 9358 6200.
Museum open: Thurs-Sats.
Running: Apr 18.

DATES FOR THE DIARY

Galas and other events in the coming weeks...

A list of currently published special events. For full details of these services, as well as any additional ones, you are advised to check the websites of the railway or museum you are intending to visit.

APRIL
- 10/11 Twin Peaks Diesel Gala, Ecclesbourne Valley Railway and Peak Rail
- 10-12 Legends of Steam III, East Lancashire Railway
- 10-12 Branch Line Gala, Llangollen Railway
- 11/12 Vintage weekend, Gloucestershire Warwickshire Railway
- 11/12 Medieval Weekend, Lincolnshire Wolds Railway
- 11/12 Model Railway weekend, Swanage Railway
- 12 Photo Char-TR, Talyllyn Railway
- 16-19 Spring Steam Gala, Severn Valley Railway
- 17 Sensory Story Tram, Seaton Tramway
- 17-19 Spring Steam Gala, Epping Ongar Railway
- 18 Mayor's Charity Day, Apedale Valley Light Railway
- 18 The Asparagus Express, Gloucestershire Warwickshire Railway
- 18/19 Road Rail Steam Rally, Great Central Railway
- 24-26 Spring Diesel Gala, Great Central Railway
- 24-26 Spring Steam Gala, Mid-Hants Railway
- 25 Junior engineering experiences, Kent & East Sussex Railway
- 25/26 Diesel Gala, Bodmin Railway
- 25/26 The Snowdonian, Ffestiniog & Welsh Highland Railways
- 25/26 Thomas' Branch Line Weekend, Nene Valley Railway
- 25/26 Miniature Madness, Peak Rail
- 26 Drive-it Day, Apedale Valley Light Railway
- 26 Spring Railwayana car boot sale & Class 37 running day, Gloucestershire Warwickshire Railway
- 26 The Great Isle of Wight Dog Walk & Show, Isle of Wight Steam Railway
- 26 Green fun day, Kent & East Sussex Railway

MAY
- 1-4 Spring Steam Spectacular, West Somerset Railway
- 2/3 Cab a Loco weekend, Gloucestershire Warwickshire Railway
- 2/3 Visiting Loco Weekend, Moors Valley Railway
- 2/3 Model railway weekend, Severn Valley Railway
- 2-4 Steam into the 40s, Didcot Railway Centre
- 2-4 Day Out With Thomas, East Lancashire Railway
- 2-4 Real Ale Festival, Isle of Wight Steam Railway
- 2-4 Classic Comedy Weekend, North Norfolk Railway
- 2-4 Northern Rock Golden Jubilee Gala, Ravenglass & Eskdale Railway
- 3 Goods train day, Dean Forest Railway
- 3 Classic Car Rally, Epping Ongar Railway
- 3/4 Murder mystery special, Lincolnshire Wolds Railway
- 3/4 Bank Holiday steam days, Mid-Suffolk Light Railway
- 4 Star Wars Day, Kent & East Sussex Railway
- 4 Vintage Vehicle Rally, Wensleydale Railway
- 7-10 Diesel Gala & Beer Festival, Swanage Railway
- 9 Talyllyn Women's Day, Talyllyn Railway
- 9/10 All Things Diesel Festival, Aln Valley Railway
- 10 Bus & Commercial Vehicles Rally, Apedale Valley Light Railway
- 10 Vintage Road & Rail Rally, Ecclesbourne Valley Railway
- 14 Founders' Day, Talyllyn Railway
- 14-17 Spring Diesel Festival, Severn Valley Railway
- 15-17 75th Anniversary Gala, Talyllyn Railway
- 16/17 Road meets Rail, Bluebell Railway
- 16/17 Road meets Rail, Bluebell Railway
- 16/17 Model Railway Workshop, Ffestiniog & Welsh Highland Railways
- 16/17 1940s weekend, Keighley & Worth Valley Railway
- 16/17 1940s weekend, Kent & East Sussex Railway
- 16/17 Horror Con, Llangollen Railway

Organising a gala or other big event? Email the details to Owen Hayward at owen.hayward@kelsey.co.uk

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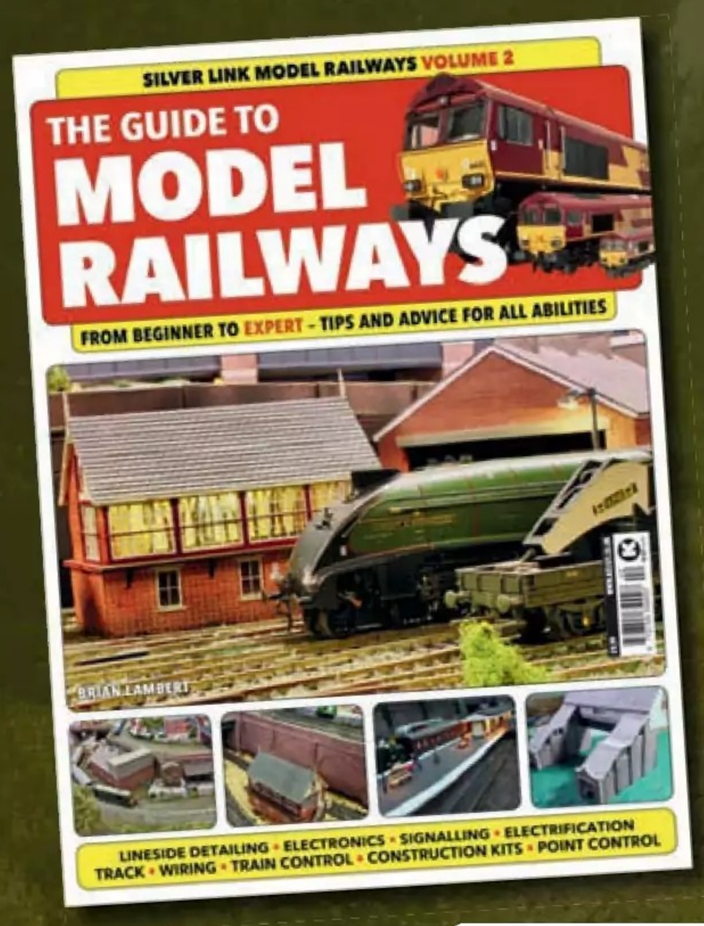

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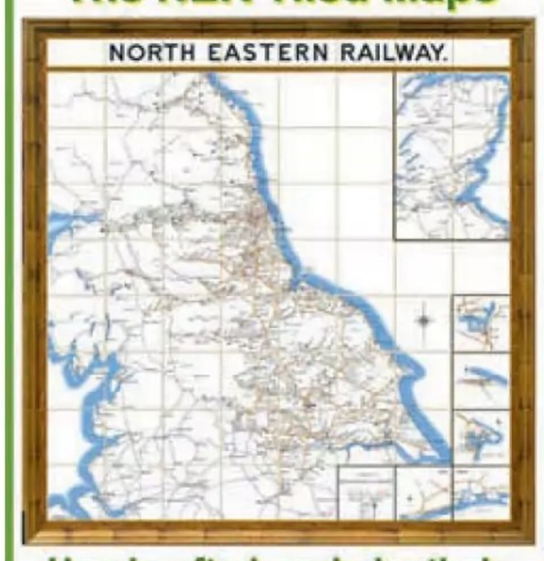

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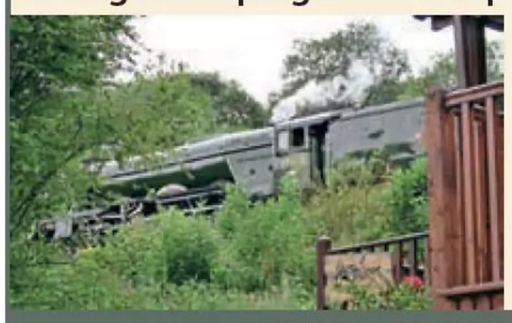

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Beeching at Bitton as Avon Valley remembers closure 60 years later

By Owen Hayward

THIS year marks the 60th anniversary of the closure of not only the Somerset & Dorset Railway, but also the connecting line which ran from Bath Green Park to Bristol Temple Meads.

Part of the latter forms the basis of the Avon Valley Railway, and to mark six decades since the last train over it, the heritage line staged 'The People and their Protest' on March 8, a day which recreated scenes of public dissent that were regular occurrences when large parts of a once extensive rail network was being closed under the Beeching Axe.

The last passenger train between Bristol and Bath ran on March 6, 1966, bringing the curtain down on 97 years of public services which started in 1869 when the line was opened by the Midland Railway. The AVR's event focused on the social history and impact of the closure of the line, such as how it affected staff, communities, and the transportation of goods around the region as communities became disconnected due to the loss of their local stations. Working alongside and championing local acting group The Kingswood Players, characters from the era roamed Bitton station and travelled on board services throughout the day, interacting with passengers, protesting against the railway's closure, and explaining how losing their service would affect them. Dr Beeching himself also made an appearance, adding to the drama of the occasion.

Right: No fans to be won here: Dr Beeching at Bitton with his infamous blue-covered Report on the Reshaping of British Railways. ADAM ASHFORD

Meanwhile, a unique exhibition carriage was included as part of the service train, aboard which displays showcased the closure era and history of the railway, alongside wider themes of Bristol's strong protest history, stretching up to the modern day.

Leading this event were two of the AVR's youngest volunteers, trustee Joseph Dean and visitor services volunteering officer Matilda Snook.

"This was an opportunity to shine a light on Bristol's strong protest history all the way through to the modern day, and no better way to do it with real people and one of our historic moving trains," explained Matilda.

"Re-enactors in and around Bitton station provided not just something educational for our passengers, but also an experience which is uniquely interactive and engaging."

The event was also an opportunity to look forward to the future of the AVR and "reaffirm its long-term aspiration to restore the railway to the outskirts of Bath," said Joseph, with the unveiling of a plaque at Avon Riverside station, near the end of the current operational line. "The AVR really is more than just a heritage railway, it's a key community asset and living museum, exhibiting our shared heritage – something we really hope to showcase with this event," he added.

The new plaque at Avon Riverside station outlining the railway's aim to return to Bath. ADAM ASHFORD

Steamship *Waverley* takes to the road!

PS Waverley, the world's last seagoing paddle steamer, which was built for the LNER, has been seen steaming all around the British Isles, whether cruising 'Doon the Watter' on the Clyde, or sailing up the Thames into London itself. However, the famous vessel, launched 80 years ago, can now be seen on the road!

You're likely to spot the ship on the motorway and on city streets around the UK thanks to the company's newly-acquired Renault Master van, providing land-based support services to *Waverley* during her 2026 season.

Paul Semple, Waverley Excursions general manager, said: "Every year we've hired vans to transport stores, spares, and publicity material, so we decided to acquire our own van and get extra value by branding it up with pictures of the iconic ship as a mobile advert space. It's generated a lot of interest, and people have told us that they've been quite fascinated to report that they've been passed by *Waverley* on the motorway!

"I know we get around the country during the operating season, but it's the first time that our famous ship has taken to the roads."

Paul said it is an idea that heritage railways might also like to adopt, using the space on their service vans to generate mobile publicity for their lines, and with powerful imagery in the shape of steam trains. He feels that it's an opportunity not to be missed.

"There's no doubt that an attractively-branded van does gain attention, as well as providing us with a real transport function at a more economical rate than hiring," added Paul. "We've also taken steps to discourage van thieves by adding the appropriate wording of 'paddle spares are not kept in this van overnight'!"

***PS Waverley* takes to the road with Paul Semple at the wheel.** HUGH DOUGHERTY

NEXT ISSUE
Issue 345 out May 8
Nicola Fox looks at the Churnet Valley Railway's Leek extension to see how the project has bedded in after a full year in operation.

PLUS
PIONEERING PICTURES
Behind the lens: Owen Hayward speaks to young Talyllyn Railway volunteer Nathan Spence about the establishment of its in-house photographic charter endeavour.

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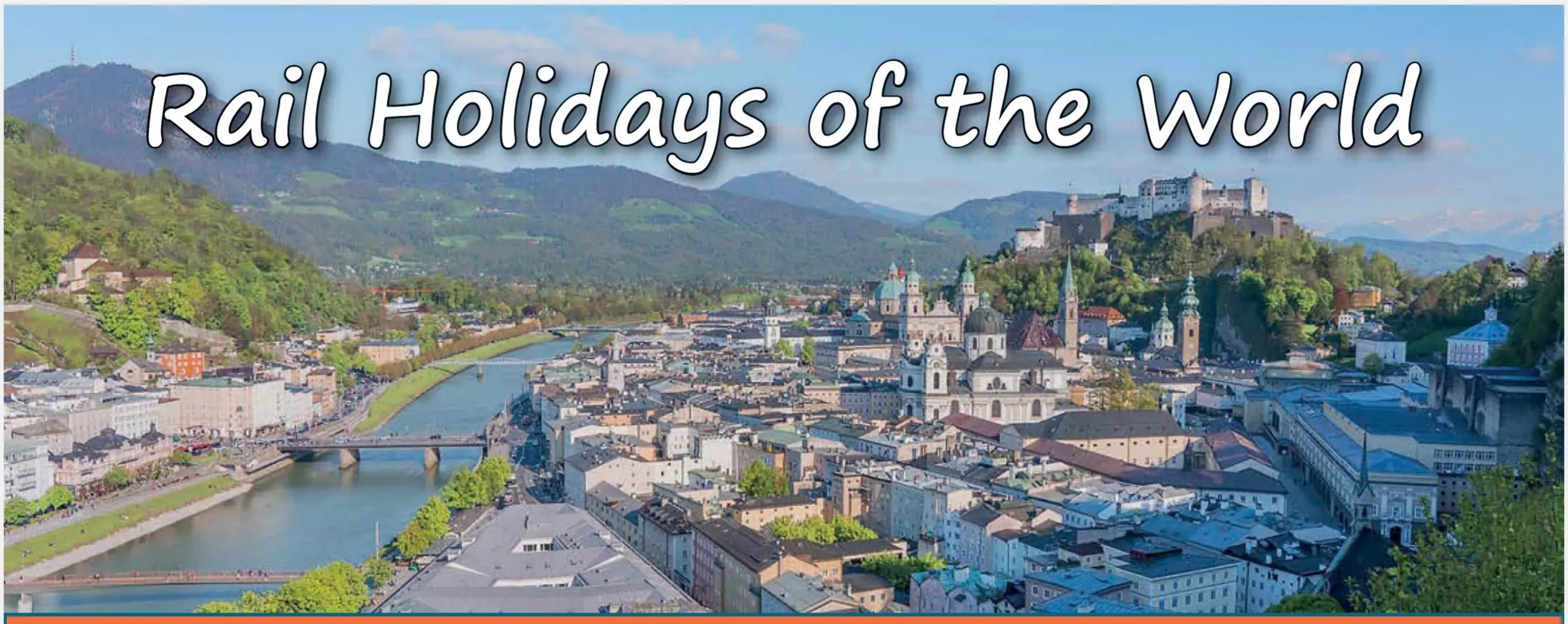

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