



WSRHT Education Service: Teachers' Information Pack

General Information

Planned by Isambard Kingdom Brunel as a branch line of the Bristol and Exeter Railway and opened in 1862, the West Somerset Railway is the longest standard gauge independent heritage railway in the UK.

Beginning at Bishop's Lydeard, the line stretches across the Somerset countryside for 22 miles and passes through 8 other stations before terminating at the seaside town of Minehead.

The line covers a 100 year period of railway history from the 1860s to 1960s, giving a unique insight into the important role that the railways played during a time of massive industrial and social change for Great Britain.

The Learning Programme

The WSRHT Education Service offers a broad range of resources and support for schools, including both on-site and outreach opportunities.

With close links to the National Curriculum, our learning programme covers, not only national and local history, but also the STEM subjects too.

Museum-Based Learning Sessions:

Learning sessions cost £45 for a class of up to 32 children and last approximately one hour. STEM extension activities are charged at an additional £30 per class when taken with another learning session or £45 as a stand-alone. Sessions are led by our Learning Officer, a qualified teacher, and take place in our learning space in the lower section of the museum. Because of the size of the space, it may be necessary to divide large groups into two for the session.

In School Learning Sessions:

Learning Sessions can now come to you! For the same price, we will bring our learning sessions, complete with costumes and resources, into your classrooms. These can be used as a basis for a themed experience day, or simply as a topic focus. All of our current sessions, including the STEM investigations are available in this format.

Current Learning Sessions Available:

- EYFS/KS1: 'A trip to the Seaside'
- EYFS/KS1: Living at Three Chimneys – 'Exploring Edwardian life with the Railway Children'
- KS1: Who was Isambard Kingdom Brunel?
- KS2: Deadly Forces: Exploring safety on the railway – 'Why did the Railway Children become heroes?'
- KS2: Victorian Britain: 'How did the railways change people's lives in our locality?'
- KS2: Operation Pied Piper: 'What was it like to be an Evacuee during the Second World War?'

Railway themed STEM Investigation Sessions

Learning sessions can be extended with the addition of a STEM-related investigation- allow at least an additional hour in your visit for these. Many of these can be adapted to suit either a KS1 or KS2 class – let us know what you require when you book. Current sessions include:

The Gauge investigation – exploring the differences between Brunel's broad gauge and the standard gauge railway lines.

Brunel's Great Bridge Challenge – children are challenged to design and build a bridge sturdy enough to hold a train.

Stevenson's Rocket Challenge – children construct their own compressed-air powered locomotive.

Further details on request.

Digital Resource Packs

Containing background information to get you started, a large selection of photos which can be either printed for displays or incorporated into your whiteboard presentations and a collection of worksheets, challenge cards and printable replicas our digital resource packs allow us to send some of the magic of the railway – and the museum to you. Current resource packs include:

- The Seaside (EYFS/KS1)
- The Railway Children: Edwardian Life (EYFS/KS1)
- Isambard Kingdom Brunel (KS1)
- Victorian Britain: The Industrial Revolution (KS2)
- WW2 and Evacuation (KS2)

For more information on these, click on the [Resource Packs](#) link on our website.

Loans Boxes

Designed to give children a more genuine insight into a topic, by offering the opportunity to gain tactile experience of handling objects and replicas, our loans boxes cover a variety of Primary History Topics. Each box contains a collection of objects, photos and costumes from the museum's handling collection, which can be used to support your class by forming the basis of discussions, drama activities, comparative activities or mystery object games.

Current Loans Boxes include:

- The Seaside (EYFS/KS1)
- The Railway Children: Edwardian Life (EYFS/KS1)
- Isambard Kingdom Brunel (KS1)
- Victorian Britain: The Industrial Revolution (KS2)
- WW2 and Evacuation (KS2)

For more information on these, click on the [Loans Boxes](#) link on our website

Visiting the West Somerset Railway

The Railway and its museums are operational between March-October (please see individual timetables for specific dates and times of trains) and we welcome school groups throughout this period. In-school sessions, loans boxes and digital packs are available throughout the whole year.

The Gauge Museum is based at Bishops Lydeard station on Platform One. Following an extensive re-fit during 2020, the museum now tells the complete story of the West Somerset Railway; from its beginnings, at the hands of Brunel, to its decline and subsequent recovery, also covering themes such as the Industrial Revolution, the growth of holiday towns such as Minehead and the impact of the railway on the local economy. There are also opportunities to actively engage with our collections by investigating our interactive puzzles and exhibits, delve deeper into our history with our touchscreen archive, try your hand at signalling in our working signal box or step aboard our lovingly restored first class Victorian sleeping carriage.

In addition to our learning sessions, we also offer the opportunity for a 'self-guided' or 'teacher led' visit with full access to the museum space. We have a variety of museum trails which allow children to interact more fully with the museum and its collection. Please contact us for more information about this.

Train Travel

Your visit to the Gauge Museum can of course be combined with the experience of travelling through the Somerset countryside behind a restored steam locomotive.

The WSR offers a range of possible routes on our line, allowing you to tailor your visit in terms of time and expense.

For more information and a list of potential options and prices, please go to the [Planning your Educational Visit](#) section of our website.

Facilities for School visits

The Gauge Museum is housed in a 19th Century goods shed, which means that unfortunately, space is limited. We use our lower floor exhibition area for school visits, where we have a carpeted seating area and a large digital screen. Facilities are provided for children to store their belongings for the duration of their visit. Due to size restrictions in the museum, it may be necessary to divide classes into smaller groups for each activity.

Accessibility

The age of our building means that unfortunately the Gauge Museum has some access limitations. The ground floor exhibition space is fully accessible to wheelchair users and the lower floor education space can be reached via a rear entrance. Unfortunately, there is currently no access to the model railway exhibition on the mezzanine floor.

Our Victorian sleeping carriage has extremely narrow corridors and unfortunately does not offer a wide enough turning circle for wheelchairs.

Please always make us aware of any wheelchair users or visitors with specific needs at the time of booking or before the day of your visit.

Parking

Parking facilities for the museum are at the far end of the industrial estate, next to the picnic area and adventure playground. There is a short walk from the car park to the station platform past the engine sheds, though if preferred, there is a drop off point for coaches outside the station entrance (missing out the engine sheds).

Toilet Facilities

Teachers should please note that unfortunately the Gauge Museum does not have toilet facilities on site, but that toilets are available on the other side of the platform with disabled access. Additionally, there are toilet facilities on board all of our trains and at the following stations:

- Crowcombe Heathfield *
- Stogumber*
- Williton
- Watchet*
- Blue Anchor
- Dunster
- Minehead*

* Toilets with disabled access

Lunchtime Arrangements

The picnic area is a short walk from the station next to the main car park. It is equipped with picnic benches and play equipment. If the weather is poor, children may eat their lunches in the learning space in the museum or in the station waiting room. Lunches may also be consumed on the trains. There is a café on the station opposite the museum that serves drinks and light bites.

Please Note: The behaviour of pupils during lunchtime is the responsibility of the teacher. Please clear up any litter before leaving the area. If any cleaning materials or extra bin bags are needed, please ask.

Shop

Children are welcome to visit the Bishops Lydeard Station shop which sells a selection of railway related souvenirs. Please be aware that standard conditions still apply during a shop visit i.e. minimum supervision ratios need to be adhered to and behaviour of pupils closely monitored.

Safeguarding

The West Somerset Railway is strongly committed to protecting and promoting the welfare of children and young people and expects all staff, volunteers and visitors to embrace this commitment.

Please contact us if you would like a copy of our Safeguarding Policy and Procedure.

Photography and Filming

The WSRHT follows a policy whereby the photography and filming of school children on organised school visits by general visitors are not permitted in the Museum. Visitors and other members of the public who appear to be taking photographs in inappropriate circumstances should be challenged.

Teachers are otherwise welcome to take photographs of the children while in the museum or on the platform.

Risk Assessments

We can provide Risk Assessments for all educational activities within the Gauge Museum. Please note that these are written from the Museum's perspective and we recommend that

all potential Group Leaders also conduct their own risk assessments during your familiarisation visit.

Please ensure you read our Risk Assessments for school visitors before your visit and brief all accompanying adults and, where appropriate, the children.

Supervision of Groups

We require that schools observe a minimum supervision ratio of 1 to 6 at KS1, 1 to 8 at KS2 and 1 to 12 at KS3 and above. This is also the maximum group walkabout number. Classes are to be divided into small groups (as above) with a competent/trained/qualified adult responsible for the supervision and behavior of each group at all times. The behaviour and supervision of the pupils on the West Somerset Railway is the responsibility of the teacher.

Adults are to remain with their designated group at ALL times.

Familiarisation Visits

We encourage all teachers who are planning a visit to the WSR to attend a familiarisation visit. Entry to the museum is free, but please check the opening times on our website to avoid disappointment. If you wish to speak with our Learning Officer regarding your visit, please let us know in advance.

We are happy for any school staff that will be accompanying the children on the day of the actual visit to attend the familiarisation visit, so that everyone feels fully confident on the day.

Though Risk Assessments are provided, we strongly recommend that you conduct your own assessment to complement ours. Museum Trails are available, but you may also wish to develop your own learning resources to enhance the visit.