



WEST SOMERSET RAILWAY HERITAGE TRUST

About this issue

We are pleased to bring you a new edition of the Trust's Members' Newsletter, which is being relaunched. We plan to publish this twice a year. It will be sent to all current members, and also published on the Trust's website. The website contains a full archive of previous editions.

This issue concentrates on recent and current developments in the Trust. But it also contains the first in a new series titled 'Meet the Trustees'.

Plans for future editions include articles about the history of the West Somerset Railway and items from the Trust's archive.

Let us know what items you would like to see covered in future issues of the newsletter. Constructive feedback is always welcome!

Chris Bolt
Membership Secretary

From the Chairman

I am writing this just as the Steam Gala on the WSR has finished. Huge congratulations must go to Seb Welsh and the whole Gala Planning team for delivering one of the most successful Galas in recent times.

The Heritage Trust was able to play its own small part too, by enabling daily shunting demonstrations in Washford Yard for the first time using the Goods train. They proved to be very popular, as did our Gauge Museum at Bishops Lydeard with over a thousand people visiting over the four days, including a new record of over 300 people in one day.

The buzz about the railway was palpable, helped by some generally good weather. I sensed that everyone involved in delivering the gala enjoyed themselves and went home on Monday evening, thoroughly exhausted, but with a quiet sense of satisfaction at having participated in something very special on the railway.

Talking of special, I must pay tribute to all of our amazing volunteers at Bishops Lydeard, Blue Anchor and Washford, who are taking the Heritage Trust forward at great speed – sometimes it's been difficult to keep up with the pace of events! Washford especially has developed a lot more in recent months after the Heritage Carriage Restoration team moved there from Williton in February.

We recently showed around a couple of benefactors for the Trust, who were both very impressed with the work being completed there. With new undercover facilities, the team can really speed up our restoration activities and the only thing that will hold them back is funding. To this end, the Trust is planning to launch a new fundraising campaign very soon to help support them.

So these are exciting times for the Trust, and we will keep you up to date with developments.

Mike Thompson

Learning and engagement

Helen Anson has produced an interesting and varied new Learning and Education Programme for the new season (as well as playing a major role in creating the new stories for Blue Anchor Museum). You can expect to see work on developing the area outside the Gauge Museum (with the body of the Horse Box being moved to Washford) as well as extending the offer within the Museum itself for both young and old alike. This may well include bespoke tours of the Museum by well briefed stewards. Incidentally, this year you will see a number of Trust volunteers kitted out in a very smart gilet and our thanks go to Ian Camp for his efforts in putting this together.



One of the new initiatives that reflect our increasing engagement with community outreach will be a Guest Lecturer Programme which we will run between June and August. Lecturers and topics are already been gathered and surprisingly perhaps, not a lot of arm-twisting has been required! Included in this will be at least 2 talks to visiting societies which will be undertaken by Chris Austin. Many will know that Chris has had a long and varied career on the “big railway” and sharing his experience, knowledge and perspectives is something that we know he really enjoys.

Business Plan 2024-2026

At its March meeting, the Board endorsed a plan for improving our engagement with Members.

The work programme for 2024-2026 covers all parts of the Trust's activities. Major projects include:

- Washford Shed mobilisation and development;
- working with the PLC to improve the whole station; and
- developing the cattle dock area at Bishops Lydeard; and resolving the future use of Station House.

The full Plan is available to read on the Trust website at <https://www.wsrht.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Business-Plan-2024-26.pdf>.

Save the date!

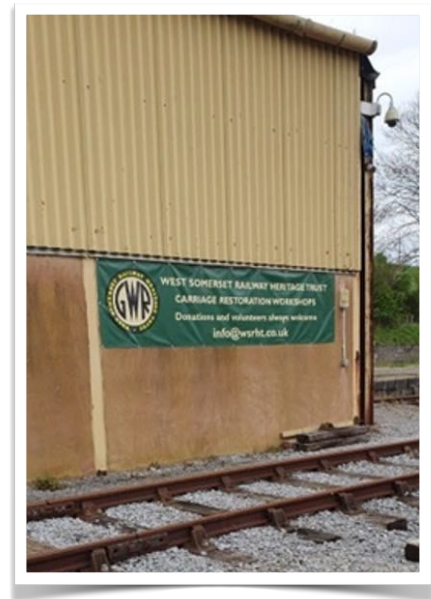
The Trust's AGM will be held on **Saturday 28 September** at 10 am in the Small Hall, Bishops Lydeard Village Hall (the same venue as last year). The AGM is an important opportunity for members to hear from the Trustees about the work of the Trust and help direct its future work.

Papers will be issued nearer the time, but if you have any queries please contact Steve Williams (email: steve@williamsemail.uk, mobile: 07748 637209).

All change at Washford!

Most people who are involved with the WSR on a regular basis will know that the Trust has now purchased the shed and trackwork at Washford and our team there has begun the process of fitting out the shed and surrounding area to allow us to start our carriage restoration activities.

In order to raise awareness of our activities at Washford, we have placed a banner on the outside of the workshop facing Washford station platform. It is hoped will help to bring in more much needed funds and also to attract more volunteers. Whilst we have a good solid team of regular volunteers, it makes sense to try and expand the team, now that we can work on two carriages at the same time, especially given the dramatic improvement in working conditions for the team.



Coach 6705 is already at Washford and agreement has been reached with the PLC on the arrangements for moving the rest of the carriage fleet including those at Dunster West siding over the coming months. The current challenge is how to move Toplight carriage 3639 from Williton to Washford to locate it on the second track in the shed. Although it can be moved short distances, it is not thought to be fit enough to run along the line to Washford, so will most likely be moved by road. The next planned movement will likely be two of the three carriages at Dunster (one is beyond

reasonable repair so will likely need to be stripped onsite in the close season). These may be fit enough to be moved by rail as part of an unfitted train, but the PLC will need to perform a full FTR (fitness to run) review before deciding on how to move them.

The final movements will be the five remaining carriages at Williton, which will most likely need to be moved by road. This is likely to happen over the next 12 months, once the sidings at Washford are strong enough to receive them. Pete Chilcott and the infrastructure team are already engaged in replacing many of the rotten sleepers, mostly located at the up end of the Washford sidings.

In terms of carriage restoration, our primary focus is ongoing work on coach 3639 together with finishing coach 6705 ready for potential operational use and static display.

For 3639, wall panel frames have been manufactured and are being painted ready for installation later this year. The end wall frame has been removed and taken to the workshop from which CAD

drawings will enable us to make new and wall frames. Full restoration will require additional fundraising, and this is already being planned.

Coach 6705 arrived at Washford on 14 February and we have purchased a vacuum pump to allow us to test a vacuum braking system on the carriage. The necessary pipework and couplings between the pump and the carriage vacuum system are being created. Additionally, water damaged internal panels have been removed and one side of the coach below the windows has been stripped back to metal ready for repainting.



Under the terms of the lease with the PLC, we will be working to the PLC Safety Management System. We have also agreed with the PLC that the Trust will work to support this sustainability of the heritage and historic nature of Washford station.

With an improved focus on safety, the team is working with John and Martin Brown on to continue on our Safety Documentation set, focusing now to include machine-specific risk-assessments prioritised in the order the machines are likely to be commissioned in the Washford workshops. We will also develop proposals for a workshop safety training course for all of our volunteers.

The Trust is investing in equipment and supporting facilities to supplement that included in the purchase agreement with the Somerset and Dorset Railway Trust. John Waters and the group have already installed shelving, a dust extractor and an air compressor as well as making some remedial repairs to the shed. To help improve safe access to carriages, two 2.4m staging sections have been completed to form a 4.8m assembly complete with steps and balustrades. A second 4.8m staging assembly is now well underway to provide safe access on the other side of the carriage.



The move to Washford means that we have secured a cost-effective solution which, for the first time, delivers proper covered accommodation for the carriage restoration volunteers. We have therefore ceased our activities at Williton.

Board and governance developments

The Trust has updated its Business Plan covering the period 2024 to 2026. The Mission Statement adopted in 2018 remains the same which is: "To encourage and engage with visitors through interpretation of the social and economic and physical impact of the railway in Somerset and the West Somerset Railway corridor in particular. To inform and inspire the next generation, particularly through the STEM subjects, the science, technology and engineering of railways and its relevance to mathematics as well as history, geography and economics."

The Business Plan, which can be read at full on the Trust's website, sets out planned developments across the whole range of the Trust's activities over the next three years. Washford Shed and yard mobilisation and development will continue to occupy a significant amount of project management time within the Trust, alongside completion and reopening of Blue Anchor Museum, continued work on the Heritage Carriages Restoration Programme and taking forward plans to develop the cattle dock area at Bishops Lydeard.

The Plan will now be reviewed by annually as many of our projects and activities span more than one financial year. We have established a Finance and Governance Group to oversee the operational running of the Trust and will be introducing portfolio based budgets for the first time. We are grateful to Matt Sutton for his continued stewardship of the website and more developments are planned in year with the new opportunities created by the PR and membership initiatives.

Museum Accreditation continues to move forward through the Working Group coordinated by Geoff Evens. Things have gone really well and there is a possibility that the Trust will be ready to submit its application to the Arts Council at the end of 2024. One of the complementary activities that has run alongside accreditation has been the development of our internal arrangements for meeting Disclosure and Barring Service requirements as well as developing a new Safeguarding Policy. This work has been led by John Robinson and in March the Trust Board approved the latter for implementation.

The move to Washford has reinforced the importance of safety and compliance work and application within the range of Trust activities. A renewed focus is therefore been given to ensuring that we have the right policies and procedures and risk assessments in place to enable volunteers to operate safely and to the requirements of the SMS. Martin Brown has been coordinating this work across the various teams and is also developing a new corporate risk register for the charity.

We held a very positive preseason briefing for volunteers at Bishops Lydeard on 16 March (including managing the disruption and short notice move to the meeting room caused by a planned, but not notified to the WSR, power cut that affected most of Bishops Lydeard station!). Presentations on HOPS by Steve Sagrott, Accreditation by Geoff Evens, Learning and Education by Helen Anson and the Trust Business plan by Steve Williams were well received.

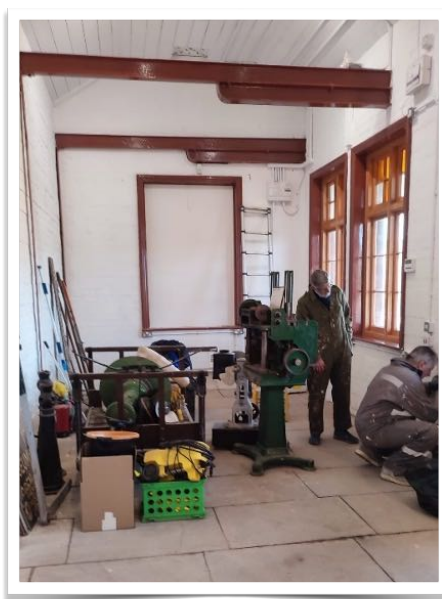
Steve Williams

Museum news

Following winter maintenance, work has continued to develop the displays at Bishops Lydeard. Ian Camp and his team squeeze the most out of our limited space, by rotating our large collection of items and constantly coming up with new themes to promote to potential visitors. April was a little quieter than last year, with just over 1200 visitors (but still higher than 2022), but this was most likely down to the dreadful weather with many rainy days in the month. We continue to see a number of overseas visitors and the model railway team has certainly helped out by being open far more days during the week.



At Blue Anchor, work continues under difficult circumstances. Internal painting is now largely complete but the bad weather in March and April has continued to cause much water ingress, mainly due to overflows from the bank above, which has resulted in standing water in the museum.



The PLC has committed to clearing the ditch at the top of the bank, but realistically, given the traditional lime mortar in the walls, the building is never going to be completely watertight. We have also discovered that several of the original vents in the roof have been blocked, which means it takes much longer to dry out.

However, work continues and we have recently ordered the new displays which will go on the walls, but slightly raised up to reduce the risk of any flood damage. These will be similar in design to the museum at Bishops Lydeard, including some activities for children, but with a general focus towards the northern end of the line. It has been a long haul but thanks to the continued work of Helen Anson – and the recent project leadership of her father, John – we are hopeful the museum will be ready to re-open soon.

We need to make a special mention also of the work of the MODES team coordinated by Peter Over and including Mike Boyce and Alan Tilley amongst others. For those who don't know MODES is a computer programme which is enabling the charity to digitise its artefacts. So far, the team have logged up to 4000 items either owned or under the stewardship of the Trust and have between 400 and 500 to go. Once completed, we will have the most comprehensive understanding of our collection in the history of the charity and this will enable us not only to rotate items for display and exhibition but also make decisions on priorities for retention and disposal. We will also be able to be much more rigorous in our assessment of the heritage importance and value of potential new artefacts being offered to the Trust.

Meet the Trustees

The West Somerset Railway Heritage Trust is a charitable company limited by guarantee. So the Trustees are also the directors of the company. There are currently ten Trustees.

Here, the two most recent appointees introduce themselves.

John Waters



Born and raised in NW London, I came to the Southwest, first to university, and then after a time working in London, back to Somerset where I have lived with my family for the past 38 years. I'm an engineer by training and have spent all my working life in various roles in the research sector of both the telecommunications and IT industry – far removed from anything railway-related. In my retirement I'm now well occupied with the maintenance of our small holding, helping my wife look after our flock of sheep and of course, volunteering for the West Somerset Railway Heritage Trust.

For me it's important that our transport heritage is preserved in a way that offers as broad an experience as possible. The WSR and the Heritage Trust do this by offering an operating Heritage Railway attraction plus an expertly curated museum experience suitable for young and old alike, and I feel that with my skills I can make a positive contribution to the development of the railway.

I've been working with the carriage restoration team for nearly 8 years. During this time the team has made remarkable progress in the restoration of 6705, our 1938 Collett Brake Corridor Composite, which is now close to completion. We have also managed to manufacture the greater part of the timber frame for our next project, 3639, our 1908 Toplight, and all this with very limited facilities. In February this year the Trust became the proud owners of a wonderful new workshop at Washford which we are now using for the restoration of our Heritage Carriage fleet. Over the next year or two I believe we have an opportunity to capitalise on this investment and, with careful thought, develop our carriage restoration processes so that we can significantly increase the speed with which our restorations are carried out and, I would like to think, become a significant and respected member of the Heritage Carriage restoration community in the UK.

Always an engineer, volunteering for the Heritage Trust allows me to feed my appetite for continuing to learn new things, for solving new engineering challenges and for the opportunity to create something that supports a fantastic Heritage Railway attraction. More than that, however, I think it's the great group of people that work in the Trust that really makes it a special place to be.

John Robinson



I am a 'people person' with close family, social interests, hobbies and a people-focused career. Having graduated and with professional qualifications, my administrative and HR roles at operating power stations and major power station construction sites provided experience at the sharp end of business and project management. Early retirement and gaining a teaching qualification enabled me to pursue a career in local FE colleges, teaching and leading teams delivering adult literacy and numeracy – a second chance for many students. These life experiences, including a YMCA Trusteeship and volunteering, have been invaluable and given me the satisfaction of helping and seeing individuals succeed.

Locally based after working elsewhere, in 2013 I considered opportunities for volunteering with WSR – the interest was the people if not the trains! The then Personnel Director interviewed a colleague and myself - we gelled and the Personnel [later HR] Department was born. My commitment grew as I realised the range of skills and people needed to run the railway. Initially HR Adviser, later Head of HR, I felt able to contribute professionally as an individual and through the team to support management and staff alike. After five years, with organisational change, I took up an alternative volunteer project role with a nearby Museum Trust. On project completion I revisited WSR and WSRHT to explore volunteering opportunities. Given my background I joined Helen Anson's team as a Learning Assistant. Working alongside Ian Camp's team I later also became a Museum Steward. I could, and can, see these are roles are vital to the expansion of the museum. I volunteered to help progress towards museum accreditation- becoming more committed as the impetus grew. This provided an insight to the issues for the museum and opportunity to contribute to the process. I was invited to undertake a much-needed Safeguarding Lead role and subsequently an increasing involvement in people-related matters. I was privileged to be co-opted as a Trustee in Autumn 2023 and, subject to election at the AGM, will contribute to the continued success of the Heritage Trust.

The Business Plan says 'Volunteers are the lifeblood of the Trust'. I have an identified portfolio of Safeguarding, including DBS Inclusion and Diversity. During this and next year, working with fellow Trustees and managers, I will produce a People Plan. This will set out a clear strategy for the further recruitment of volunteers and development of our current volunteers to meet the HR challenges and targets across our activities. Its delivery, involving all concerned, is a key to underpinning our business.

I enjoy the work and demands of being a Trustee, as well as my front-line roles. The Heritage Trust gives me opportunities as an individual to contribute to strategy and to make things happen through people.

A vision for the Trust

One of the roles the Trust looks to play on the railway is to create heritage attractions that will help bring more visitors to the line. At the moment, we currently run two fairly small museums at Bishops Lydeard and Blue Anchor, but I constantly wonder how we might go about expanding our presence.

We certainly have no shortage of heritage items to put on display, and indeed with the right sized accommodation, there are plenty of exhibits that could be displayed undercover, which might even attract owners of locomotives awaiting restoration to keep them in a protected environment.

One of the obvious areas that we have looked at before is the area to the west of Bishops Lydeard. There is a vast swathe of land owned by the PLC which is currently not utilised at all – and even Blackmore House is up for planning review in the next couple of years. However, even if the PLC was to lease the land to the charities, this would not be sufficient to attract external funding as most grant funders require charities to be in full ownership of land for projects to be approved.

There is a clear challenge here to work out how to move forward. Ideally, we would develop an attraction that could stand on its own feet and even be open on non-running days. Imagine driving down the M5 and seeing a sign for (say) a ‘South West Heritage Transport Museum’. Would that be appealing enough to persuade you to turn off the motorway? I know many people believe that is the next obvious step, and it would bring huge benefits to the railway as well.

As we move towards September, the Trust Board will be preparing for the 2024 AGM. Draft Statutory accounts have been prepared and Directors Reports are being written as we speak. There is a lot to reflect on in terms of achievements in 2023 and the first half of this year and so it will be a very positive set of messages from the Trust. But future achievements depend crucially on your support for our many projects, either through volunteering or via your generous donations. Please feel free to come along just for a day if you wish, and hopefully this will inspire you to support the Trust’s activities. Alternatively, we can always be reached at info@wsrht.co.uk for more information.

Mike Thompson

New appointments

Reflecting its changing and developing role on the railway, the Trust has made some new appointments to specific roles within the charity.

Chris Bolt, who was the PLC Finance Director for three years and a previous Treasurer and Trustee of the charity, has rejoined as our new Membership Secretary.

We are also delighted to welcome George Legg as the new Model Railway Manager. George is a long time Model Railway Group volunteer and also works on the railway itself.

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

If you have moved to a new house, changed your email address, or are no longer eligible for Gift Aid, please inform the Membership Secretary, Chris Bolt, at cwbolt@gmail.com. If you would like to check what information we hold for you, please use the same address.