



WEST SOMERSET RAILWAY HERITAGE TRUST

About this issue

Welcome to this special AGM edition of the newsletter. In it, you will find a report on the AGM, covering in particular the Chairman's report and the report presented by Helen Anson on the education and learning programme. Also included is a summary of the Q&A session, which now includes additional responses to some of the questions.

To keep you up to date, the newsletter also contains reports on the other two main areas of Trust activity - carriage restoration and museums.

Your support is very important to us in delivering our ambitious plans and as always we would welcome your feedback and ideas for future activities.

The next 'regular' edition of the newsletter will be sent out early in the New Year. So the Trustees wish you in advance a happy Christmas.

Chris Bolt

Membership Secretary and Trustee,
Membership and Communications

From the Chairman

As we reach the end of another successful operating season, the Heritage Trust can look back with pride at the achievements of the past 12 months.

By far the largest achievement was the purchase of the former S&DRT shed and track at Washford, along with an agreement for a 10-year lease of the site from the PLC. We have already moved around half of our heritage carriages to the Washford site, with plans well advanced to move the remaining carriages early in the New Year.

The Trust held its Annual General Meeting on Saturday 28th September in the Village Hall at Bishops Lydeard. There was again a good turnout of Members and I was delighted to get to speak with so many of you who were able to come along. Several members commented how they feel the Trust is really moving forward and growing its presence on the railway.

The Trust's finances are in good shape and, although it was a fairly quiet year in terms of legacies, we are already seeing evidence of further probates underway where the Trust is likely to benefit. It is heartening to know that so many people think of us when preparing their wills and I am determined that the Trust will deliver on these expectations.

The museum team recently held an act of remembrance in the Gauge Museum commemorating the GWR railway workers who died in the war. The presence of a locomotive in steam added to the atmosphere – more evidence of the different groups on the railway working together for a beneficial outcome. Much credit must also go to Ian Camp for taking this from the seed of an idea to a well-respected ceremony on the railway. We are hoping to turn this into an annual event.

Another new event was a drinks reception held in the museum for a wedding party before boarding the QB on Platform 1. I kept a distant watch on events and could see there was a fantastic atmosphere and that everyone really

enjoyed themselves. It was another example of the railway groups working well together, and weddings are something we should definitely promote on the railway.

As reported by John Waters, the carriage restoration team at Washford has already done an amazing job fixing the various leaks in the roof and sorting out the vacuum brakes on 6705, which we hope to see operating in 2025. During the recent 40's weekend, we also held our first open day at the Washford shed and the team did a fantastic job setting up access facilities for our first time visitors, after completing the required risk assessment documentation. Everything went off very smoothly and this event helped to raise further funds for the Heritage Trust. We also had a recent visit from the General Manager and CME of the PLC to check on our compliance with the PLC Safety Management System (SMS) and I can report they were very pleased with the progress made with the facilities at Washford. We also received some helpful suggestions which the team will be implementing over the next few months.

Blue Anchor museum remains our biggest short term challenge. The team there has made great strides with preparing the museum to receive the new displays but sadly, water ingress is still a problem, creating significant damp issues. The Trust is working closely with the PLC and the plan is to bring in a drainage contractor to try and divert some of the flows.

The Trust continues to develop its community outreach and education activities, providing enriching learning opportunities for individuals of all ages. We offer a variety of engaging activities such as guides, trails, and family-friendly events to enhance customer visits and deepen understanding of our fascinating history. I was delighted to see the Trust receive a grant of just under £5000 for our 'Talking Nature' project. This grant was awarded by Museum Development South West, with support from Arts Council England. I also recently attended a lecture in West Buckland to hear Chris Austin give a fascinating presentation on various historical aspects of the railway. There was a large turnout of over 50 people and we received a generous donation from this community group.

Work also continues on the Arts Council Accreditation process for our museums, now under the guidance of Steve Williams, following the recent departure of Geoff Evens. The focus continues to be on collections management and how we care for our various artefacts. We are confident of submitting an application by the Art Council deadline of October 2025.

Finally, the Board continues to plan for the future. It will continue our regular reviews of the Trust Business Plan in light of recent developments, and is very focused on fundraising given the likely demands on our resources over the next few years. We still have nine more carriages to restore and we want to erect some canopies to give them more protection. We have agreed to work in partnership with the Association and the PLC to establish a Fundraising Coordinating Group to provide oversight and structure to the way in which we pursue external grants and other funding opportunities. This should help ensure we are seen working together as one railway and not overlapping in any grant applications.

As always, I will end by encouraging your support for our many projects, either through volunteering or via your generous donations, and I would encourage all of you to come along and support the Trust's activities. We can always be reached at info@wsrht.co.uk or by looking at the Trust's Web site www@wsrht.co.uk and on the Trust's Facebook page.

Mike Thompson

Trust 2024 AGM

The West Somerset Railway Heritage Trust held its AGM on 28 September, on the same day as the PLC and Association AGMs. There was a good turnout of 30 members - the current membership is just over 100.

As part of the formal proceedings, members received a report on the finances of the Trust. Income for 2023 was £25,248 compared to £161,000 in 2022. This reduction was due entirely to the fact that no significant donations or legacies had been received in the financial year under consideration. Given that the Trust is spending up to £30,000 per annum on operational revenue commitments including fixed costs, there is a gap which is currently being covered from savings and reserves. Therefore the Trust is looking at a number of different options around income generation including Corporate Membership and Corporate Sponsorship. The Board had established a Finance and Governance Group to oversee this process.

Looking forward to expected outturn for the current year, expenditure will be significantly different from previous years due to the impact of the cost of acquisition of Washford Yard and shed together with the 10 year lease for the site agreed with the WSR PLC. This inevitably attracted additional legal costs as did the need to disinvest from the licence to operate at Williton. The Trust has also invested in fit-out requirements at Washford to enable the engineering workshop to be used effectively by the Heritage Carriages Restoration team, and there will be more costs to come in 2026 and beyond with potential projects around staff welfare and covered canopy requirements for the sidings. Carriage 3639 will also be the subject of a formal external fundraising effort once the preferred option for carriage reconfiguration had been agreed.



Members voted to re-elect Ian Camp, Ian Coleby and Steve Williams to the Board, and formally elected John Robinson and Chris Bolt - both of whom had been co-opted during the year - to the Board.

After completion of the formal business, Mike Thompson, the Trust Chairman, opened the discussion session by paying tribute to Geoff Evens who was standing down from the Board after over 30 years' service on the West Somerset Railway. Most recently, Geoff has led work on Museum Accreditation and Mike commended his special abilities around the development of policies and procedures. Mike noted that Geoff was never afraid to voice his opinion on a range of topics most of which were based on many years' experience!

Geoff was presented with a cake baked and decorated by Pam and Helen Anson and was thanked and applauded by the Board and Members. This also gave Mike the opportunity to show the Board's appreciation to Pam Anson for providing such wonderful cakes again for the members attending the meeting.

Mike then went on to provide an overview of events across the Trust in the last 12 to 18 months.

The acquisition of Washford Yard and Shed is probably the most significant event in the recent history of the Trust. The opportunity arose in summer 2023 for the Trust to express interest in

taking ownership of the shed and engineering workshop at Washford from the Somerset and Dorset Railway Trust, along with a long-term lease of the site from the PLC. Negotiations were protracted and complex but the charity finally took ownership and possession in early 2024.

Mike Thompson paid tribute to the work of the Heritage Carriages Restoration team under the leadership of John Waters in relation to all the work that has been undertaken to turn the Shed and sidings into an engineering base which in terms of facilities and environment was a major improvement on arrangements at Williton. The Trust has now terminated its licence at Williton and instead has a 10 year lease for the Washford site. It is hoped that these new improved premises will also lead to enhanced interest amongst potential new volunteers to work as part of the team.

Following the move of Coach 6705 by rail from Williton to Washford, three unrestored carriages at Dunster were successfully moved by rail in September, using a very careful movement plan to minimise the risk of any damage during the move. In addition, Mike said that the move of Coach 3639 from Williton to Washford was planned for early October using the same procedure as for the Dunster carriages (now successfully completed). 3639 will be located in the second track inside the shed ready for the continuation of its full restoration. The experience of moving five coaches by rail meant that there was confidence that potentially some or all of our remaining vehicles could also move by rail. Any that could not be moved in this way would need to come by road.

It is hoped that 6705 will become operational and form part of gala trains in 2025. With regard to 3639 the Board, with the advice of the Heritage Carriages Restoration team, is considering options for its restoration given that at one point in time during the First World War it was configured as an ambulance coach. In the medium term, the Trust also hopes to be able to erect a covered canopy over the sidings at Washford to help protect the unrestored carriages.

Turning to museum activities, Mike referred again to the work on Museums Accreditation and paid particular tribute to the contributions from Geoff Evens and Helen Anson and the wider Museums Accreditation Working Group. Steve Williams has now agreed to lead this work going forward.

The Gauge Museum continues to thrive with the emergence of the small retail section developed by Ian Camp, and the ongoing work of the MODES team (Peter Over, Mike Boyce and Alan Tilley) in researching, describing and archiving all the artefacts either owned or hosted by the charity. There was still an issue with the need to see more people come over from Platform 2 to the Museum, but Mike said that the Trust was aware of the issue and trying to overcome the inherent limitations.

In 2024, the Trust has initiated a small series of guest lectures for outside organisations led by Chris Austin. These have proved to be very popular and sought is now being given to what we might do in 2025.

Looking to the longer term at BL, Mike said that there was great potential for improving the visitor experience on and around Platform 1 through the Covered Cattle Dock scheme, extending the Gauge Museum itself but also linking to plans that the PLC might have for the use of the Station Farm site and Blackmoor House.

Sadly, things at Blue Anchor Museum were currently not so positive. There continue to be significant problems with drainage and water ingress. There was a proposal on the table to

enhance and repair the drainage system. But we continue to look at March 2025 as the potential reopening date. Mike paid tribute to the work of John Anson and the whole team at Blue Anchor whose help and support was much appreciated.

Mike concluded by thanking the Board of Trustees and all the volunteers for their hard work over the last 18 months and look forward to a positive future for the Trust in 2025 and beyond.

Members' Q&A at the AGM

Tim Stanger: Tim said that since he joined the Trust in 2008, the charity was now a vastly different organisation in scope and scale and it was all very positive. He advised Members that in 2014, the West Somerset Railway Association brought the Hawksworth Inspection Saloon to the railway. Its relevance locally was that for part of its life, it was the Taunton Engineers coach. It was not in great condition and is currently residing under cover in Wales. Would the Trust Board be prepared to liaise with the Association Board to agree a plan whereby the coach could be brought back to the WSR as soon as possible?

Answer: It was known that the coach was on the Blaenavon and Pontypool Railway because they can provide covered accommodation for it to prevent deterioration. It was also in use on the railway from time to time and some remedial work had been undertaken. The Trust Board would consider the request and respond to Tim Stanger and other Members in due course.

Nic Wheeler: Nic introduced himself and said he was the Environmental Adviser to the PLC. He currently volunteers in the shop at Bishops Lydeard and said that there was a lack of understanding of the role of Platform 1 and the Museum within shop volunteers. One of the ways in which that could be addressed would be for the Trust to put some of its artefacts and exhibits in the shop together with information about the Museum and the wider charity (also perhaps through use of a sandwich board).

Answer: Mike Thompson said that the Trust would love to extend its facilities and services on Platform 1 to enhance the visitor experience. However, Nic makes a good point and this will be further discussed by the Trust Board and a response provided.

Alan Clifford: Alan asked two questions. Firstly, he expressed concern about the cost of rents to the Trust primarily levied by the PLC. He cited the annual cost of leasing the site at Washford particularly as operational income was not currently at the same level of outgoings.

Answer: Mike Thompson said that the Trust had already budgeted for the cost of the lease at Washford over the next 10 years and this would not have been entered into had it not been affordable. Mike also pointed to the fact that costs at Williton would have been comparable to those entered into at Washford but with much less benefit to the Trust and also a worse working environment for the volunteer team.

The second question concerned the issue of recognition of legacies by the Trust in relation to published material, plaques, naming rights et cetera. Alan felt it was important to recognise the individuals who had given money to the Trust through significant legacies and donations.

Answer: Steve Williams said that Alan had raised a valuable and legitimate point. Where the Trust had received bequests or donations with specific requirements attached, these had been honoured. However, there was currently no process for recognising more generalised legacies or donations. Coincidentally, as Company Secretary, he had advised the Board at its September meeting two days previously that there was a need for a formal Policy on Recognition of Legacies

and Donations and that a small working group of Trustees was being formed to prepare this. Once approved, details will be shared including with Members.

Alan Tilley: Why can't we get more trains to start and terminate in Platform 1 at BL?

Answer: Mike Thompson said that there were a number of reasons why this continued to be a difficult issue and the subject of ongoing discussions with the PLC in advance of almost every operating season. The principal concerns were:

- Passenger Safety. It was a narrow platform with limited circulation space and it was also difficult for people with mobility/accessibility issues to get across the line from Platform 2.
- Platform Length. In the absence of selective door operation, only short form trains could access the platform which limited its practical use to special events and galas.
- Points Layout. The configuration of points at the southern end of the station meant that any trains coming from the shed or up sidings would have to perform a double reversal, creating additional complexity and safety issues in relation to operations and signalling of these moves.

Peter Over: Why do we call the Museum at BL the "Gauge Museum" when there are no examples of broad gauge track work actually on display there?

Answer: It was confirmed that the length of broad gauge track at Crowcombe Heathfield was still in situ there and that the Board would have discussions with the PLC about the possibility of bringing it to Bishops Lydeard.

Trust Governance

The Trust continues to develop its governance and procedures. Board roles have been reviewed to reflect the current allocation of portfolios. The current allocation between Trustees is:

Mike Thompson: Chairman

Steve Williams: Vice Chairman and Company Secretary, with lead responsibility for governance, accreditation and corporate sponsorship

Don Fraser: Treasurer

Helen Anson: Learning and Collections Policy (and Learning Officer)

Chris Bolt: Membership and Communications, supported by Matt Sutton as Website Manager

Martin Brown: Safety

Ian Camp: Museum Curator, supported by Alan Tully as Assistant Museum Curator, Mike Boyce as Collections Care and Management Lead and Peter Over as Archivist and MODES Lead

Ian Coleby: Heritage and research

The Trust's Education and Learning Programme - Helen Anson

At the AGM, Helen Anson gave a presentation to Members about activities as part of the Education and Learning Programme over the last 18 months and gave a brief insight into plans for 2025.

She said that 2023 and the first part of 2024 had been a busy time with more interest been shown by schools in the Programme culminating in ten school visits together with five outreach visits to schools in the area. This included one school from Devon who came for a second time! Having undertaken a considerable amount of work to improve and extend the learning offer last year through targeted STEM subjects, on-site exhibitions and updated resource boxes, there are now plans to further extend the school and community offer. There will be particular focus on the use of outside spaces and the relationship between the environment, climate change and the railway. A successful collaboration has been established with Chris Vine, the children's author which it was hoped will continue into 2025.



Helen then described the Talking Nature project for which funding was being sought from the South West Museums Network supported by the Arts Council. (Since the AGM, we have had confirmation of success). This project focuses on the relationship between the railway, climate change and biodiversity and is being co-developed with Cotford St Luke primary school and a home learning network. We intend to illustrate how the railway contributes to the sustainability of habitats along the line and to enable children to understand these relationships and their importance for the future. The project will also provide a further space for the local community to visit and enjoy the railway.

A particular feature over the last 12 months has been how young families have used the lower ground floor at the Gauge Museum for a range of activities including crafts and playtime and have become regular visitors there particularly in the off-season. This will be continued when the railway comes to the end of its regular season at the end of October, and a new volunteer to our learning team will take the lead on developing these activities further next year. It is also hoped to update the Museum Trail with modest cost for 2025.

Helen has been in touch with a theatre group (Emerald Ant) who are looking to work with museums and special needs schools. During 2025, the project will develop learning opportunities based on the role the construction of railways played in the discovery of natural history. They are providing SEND training for volunteers and supporting the museum to further develop its provision for learners with additional needs. The project culminates in the arrival of 'Iggy' The Iguanodon Restaurant for a one day performance on the museum's cattle dock area in July 2025. Museum Stewards are already in training!

In addition to supporting the PLC at various family activities over the past 12 months, Helen described the preparations being made on the West Somerset Railway for Rail 200 to celebrate that anniversary milestone around the birth of the modern railway in Great Britain. Helen, Ian Camp and Chris Austin are members of a Working Group being coordinated by the PLC to prepare

for the event. A new downloadable Learning Pack is being developed for schools based on a STEM investigation into the Broad Gauge. This will be available on both on the Trust and PLC websites.



Finally, Helen reported on the work at Blue Anchor. Interpretation board designs now complete and the final versions ready to be printed and fitted. These have been developed with access in mind (dyslexic friendly fonts, spacing and colours, heights and font size accessible to small people and wheelchair users, hearing loops installed on touchscreen and of course with level access) which will make the Blue Anchor museum our most inclusive museum to date. The museum has also

been designed with a family demographic in mind, with interactive exhibits aimed at involving young children in active discovery. Once open it is hoped to make learning sessions available from the museum, with potential extensions for sessions such as the proposed new science ones on habitats and seaside holidays.



Waiting to reopen!



An update on Carriage Restoration at Washford - John Waters

The Heritage Trust moved into Washford shed and yard on February 1st this year. Over the past 9 months the Trust has been investing in the yard, track, buildings and workshops to create a wonderful facility to support our carriage restoration work.



Washford Yard has some 2000 feet of track and sidings and considerable amount of work has been required to bring it to a serviceable state. This work has been undertaken by the PLC infrastructure team with at times support from PWay volunteers. The Trust purchased approximately 60 sleepers that have been installed by the PLC, with 40 tonnes of ballast added to provide a level and secure installation. These sidings provide sufficient space to stable all the carriages owned by the Trust that are awaiting

Sidings with Dunster carriages in the distance

restoration. Ten carriages will be stored at Washford with two in the shed and eight in the sidings. So far five carriages have been moved to Washford and plans are being made to move the remaining five from Williton before February next year.

Washford shed itself has two full length lanes, and there are two workshops within the building: a large ground floor workshop approximately 20m x 4.5m wide and an upper workshop approximately 9m x 4.5m.



Workshop with 9037 at the far end

The Workshops now contain a full range of professional woodworking equipment capable of meeting the needs of the major joinery tasks undertaken by the team. Comprehensive dust extraction is provided by a large dust extractor stationed outside the workshop and connected by ducting to the various machines both on the ground floor and in the upper workshop. We also have a compressed air system installed which has been commissioned and tested.



Dust extractor

The team has built racking for timber storage, tools and materials storage.

Other storage is provided outside in our secure shipping container. We also recently moved the horsebox body from Bishops Lydeard to the yard. It will be used for storage until we embark on its restoration when funds permit.

In addition to the repair of the track and the installation of the workshops, the team has also made progress on 6705.

Its poor exterior paintwork has been stripped back ready for priming and painting, and a huge amount of work has been undertaken to improve the guttering on the carriage to prevent rainwater ingress that inevitably cause damage to the internal walls and paneling. Guttering with additional rubber seals has been fitted to one side of the carriage; work on the second side is now underway.



6705 with panels stripped ready for painting



Vacuum pump

The vacuum braking system has also had some extensive restoration work carried out. To help us undertake this task and to test the braking system as we make changes, we have invested in a vacuum pump; currently the brakes hold vacuum for the required 45 minutes, rather than 1 minute or less when we first started the work.

Most recently 3639 arrived at Washford and now resides in



3639 inside the shed

Lane #1. Its arrival has provided the first opportunity for most of the team to see it for the first time without tarpaulins covering it – it looks a daunting task but we can't wait to get started.

So, what's next at Washford? The work on 6705 and 3639 will continue. Our goal is to have 6705 ready to be repainted and outshopped in time for the Steam Gala and either run as part of a service train or on shuttles to Norton. We have a few final improvements to the workshop to implement and next year we will endeavour to repair the rotten sections of the main shed door, and then plan to paint them.

Finally, when funds permit, we plan to build a welfare facility for the volunteers, most likely sited adjacent the rear of the shed next to the dust extraction unit.

News from the Gauge Museum, Bishops Lydeard and Blue Anchor - Ian Camp

As we reach the end of our 2024 season, the Trust's museum team can report that a good season has been enjoyed by all, stewards and visitors alike. From April to the end of the season on 3 November, the Gauge Museum at Bishops Lydeard was open on 147 days and we welcomed 12,374 visitors. This is 8% down on visitor numbers in 2023, but we were open for 5 less days (3%). On the plus side, we have had lots of very positive comments left for the museum as a whole with many also extremely complimentary about the stewarding team.

Going through the visitors book we have had visitors from 30 different countries and those were: Holland, Germany, Republic of Ireland, Vietnam, Switzerland, Austria, China, Norway, South Africa, Portugal, Philippines, Sweden, Spain Hong Kong, Lithuania, Malta, Majorca Spain, Luxembourg, New Zealand, Malaysia, India, Canada, Sri Lanka, USA, Romania, Mauritius, Australia and Cyprus. Visitors from Germany and Holland top the poll for the most from an European country.

We had visitors from 12 of the USA states, Maine, Oklahoma, Michigan, Florida, South Carolina, North Carolina, Iowa, California, Texas, Oregon, Pennsylvania and Tennessee. 17 Australian visitors signed the book and gave us the most fun with city and towns, such as Moonbooldool, Coogee, Toowoomba & Coo롱gup. Visitors from 47 UK counties and these were only the ones recorded in the visitors' book!

Several group visits from societies during the year with some planning a return trip in 2025. School visits saw an increase on the previous year, despite the financial restrictions placed on them. We held 13 school events with nearly 200 children, as well as hosting several exhibitions and family events with over 300 people in attendance. We have also again been collaborating with the PLC on developing family activities for the summer months and will continue with this for the railway 200 project next year.

We are particularly pleased with the relationship that we are building with the local SEND schools, one coming 3 times with different year groups. We have some specific plans for the coming 2025 to build on this.

The model railway team were able to get the Model Railway open on many more occasions this year and we thank them for that although discussions are ongoing as to how we move toward opening it every day the museum is open.

Following the rededication of the GWR Roll of Honour in the museum last November, we held a service of Remembrance again this year on 9th November by request from some of last year's participants. The service was attended by Rachel Gilmour MP, representatives of Dunkirk Memorial House and the Royal British Legion and local communities along the line, as well as representatives of the Trust, the PLC and the Association.





Thanks to Kerry Noble and the PLC, Odney Manor was renamed “Norton Manor 40 Commando”, complete with 40 Commando headboard, for the occasion. The locomotive, driven by Mervyn Hebditch, Chief Traction Inspector, was in steam outside the museum for the duration of the service.

The museum also celebrated a “First” in that we hosted a

wedding party on 19 October. The bride and groom, together with 71 wedding guests celebrated with drinks in the museum before boarding the QB for their reception. The train was drawn into platform 1 to permit the wedding party to board straight from the museum. Three stewards were on duty to welcome the guests, and Model Railway Group volunteers dressed a couple of the model trains with white ribbons.



Do you know someone who would be interested in joining the Trust and supporting our work? If so, please ask the Membership Secretary for application forms!

Further information about the work of the Trust 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 chris.bolt@wsrht.co.uk. If you would like to check what information we hold for you, please use the same address.

All photos © West Somerset Railway Heritage Trust. Credits to John Anson, Ian Camp, Matt Sutton and John Waters.

New volunteers have joined us during this season, some who wish to use their practical skills in building and maintenance, another to use her professional skills as an Occupational therapist to develop more in house activities for our younger visitors and one who wishes to be directly involved with the care and collections team with cataloguing and MODES entries.

As we move into winter, we have a long list of projects for the museum and in the grounds, plus we are participating with other heritage railways and Network Rail in celebrating RAIL200 through 2025 season.

Sadly, things at Blue Anchor Museum are currently not so positive. After an enormous amount of work on internal renovation and preparations for reinterpretation by a team led now by John Anson, there continue to be significant problems with drainage and water ingress. There is a proposal on the table to enhance and repair the drainage system and we are awaiting PLC agreement and a date for the work to be undertaken.

In the meantime, the team has placed humidifiers within the building to remove and reduce dampness and humidity. After a series of difficulties with an initial supplier, a new provider has also been found to produce and replicate the storyboards created by Helen Anson to a high quality standard.

We continue to look at March 2025 as the potential reopening date for the Museum but this very much depends on the infrastructure work being completed and providing a permanent solution to the current problems.