



WEST SOMERSET RAILWAY HERITAGE TRUST

Chairman's message for 2025

About this issue

Welcome to the winter 2024/25 edition of the newsletter. Although the railway is closed to the public until late March, there is much activity behind the scenes.

As members, you have a very important role in helping to shape the future strategy of the Trust - as well of course as providing financial support through your membership subscriptions.

So as always we would welcome your feedback and ideas for future activities.

The next edition of the newsletter will be sent out Summer. We hope to see you on the railway during 2025!

Chris Bolt

Membership Secretary and
Trustee, Membership and
Communications

A Happy New Year to all of you.

As we start another New Year afresh, the Heritage Trust is pressing ahead with many developments on several fronts. My update is shorter this time as the newsletter includes direct updates from many of the leaders involved in their projects.



You may have heard already the exciting news that the long-planned move of all of our carriage stock from Williton to Washford is finally underway. As I write, the five carriages at Williton have already been lifted onto track connected to the WSR and moved into the up platform at the station, ready to be transported to Washford towards the end of January. This has only been possible with great support and cooperation of the PLC team.

It will mean, for the first time, all of the Heritage Trust carriages will be on physical rail track connected to the WSR, allowing for much more flexibility in movement. I am hoping that, ultimately, this means we will be able to speed up our restoration activities and provide a small set of working carriages for the PLC to use on the railway in the near future.

The Heritage Trust continues to evolve with more volunteers joining our museums and carriage restoration teams. We are also seeing an increase in legacies coming into the Trust as people start to see what is being achieved by the charity. This will allow the Trust to expand its activities, but only if we can find enough volunteers to fulfil them!

In my last update, we looked back with pride at the achievements of Trust during the past 12 months. Now it's time to look ahead and look at what we have planned for 2025. You will find details of some other objectives elsewhere in this newsletter, but my personal focus is on four important strategic aspects.

First, I want to see our fleet of heritage carriages placed under some form of canopy protection at Washford. This is so we can protect the carriages but allow them to be more accessible to our volunteers. We will be able to remove some tarpaulins and start to assess the detailed level of restoration work required on these carriages. This work should also include better welfare facilities for our team to include improved toilets and washroom.

Secondly, we need to work with the PLC to create a stronger profile for the Trust at Bishops Lydeard, where we are largely hidden away from the main flow of passengers who depart from Platform 2. Ideally, I would like to see some kind of visitor centre close to the main passenger flows, but this comes with its challenges as space is clearly limited in this area. The ideal solution would be a win/win proposition to provide more attractive facilities for the PLC's passengers, including a retail facility, whilst also allowing the Trust to put artefacts on display which are currently languishing in containers behind the Gauge Museum.

Thirdly, there is the matter of re-opening the Blue Anchor Museum following recent drainage works that appear to have solved the problem of water ingress during periods of heavy rain. The team at BA has encountered many frustrations over the last two years, but it seems like there is finally some light at the end of the tunnel and so we are hoping the museum can re-open in time for the 2025 season, whatever nature tries to throw at us!

Finally, we need to get our museum Accreditation process across the line. After a lengthy consultation phase over the last two and a half years, we will shortly be formally applying to the Arts Council for that recognition. Accredited status will give the Trust more national recognition, and re-assure potential external funders that we are working to clearly agreed national standards of museum management, collections care and conservation.

There are many other developments which are likely to keep us busy in the coming months, but these four will stay close to top of my agenda as we try to move forward in 2025.

In summary, I am very excited to be leading the Trust at a time of so many significant developments. There are many challenges that lie ahead but we have a great team of Trustees who are managing the daily challenges of running the Trust to whom I pass on my sincere thanks.

We also have a good working relationship with both the PLC and the Association and our goal is to ensure this continues as we try to promote a strong harmonious culture across the whole railway. It is in all of our interests for this happen as we approach the 2025 season.

Mike Thompson – Chairman WSRHT

Approach to the restoration of 3639

3639, a GWR Toplight in our heritage carriage fleet is currently under restoration at Washford. This carriage, originally built in 1908 has had a varied life, first starting passenger service with the Great Western Railway, then converted in 1915 to an ambulance coach, moving to France in 1916 providing the link between the front line and major hospitals and the ports.

After the war it was returned to service, with a 1921 build configuration as a TK (Third Class Compartment) coach. Service continued for 35 years before being converted to a camping coach in January 1957.

3639 finally came to the WSR in 1973, but it was not until 2007 that a small amount of restoration work was started. Lack of resources at that time meant that work was suspended until in 2021, when restoration work on the carriage was restarted in earnest.

Much of the wooden floor and wall frames have been constructed over the past 3 years. The carriage has recently been moved to Washford and is now under cover in our carriage shed. This gives us the opportunity to make good progress on its restoration, as we are not at the mercy of the weather. However, before making further progress, we needed to decide what specification the carriage should be restored to. Several different options were considered, the most significant of these being (1) as originally built in 1908, (2) a configuration as used in an ambulance train of the First World War, (3) a configuration for its return to service in 1921.

The restoration team presented these three options to the Trustees. After considerable discussion, both within the Board of Trustees and with the restoration team, it has been decided to pursue a 1908 specification, but with one compartment and vestibule dedicated as a museum space in which the history of the coach as part of an ambulance train can be recognised and displayed. This configuration maximises the use of the investment in the coach rebuild already done and follows a build which we believe will be easier and cheaper for us to complete rather than the later 1921 configuration, and provides 7 compartments for passengers, thus enabling revenue earning potential for the Trust.

A full ambulance train configuration (option (2) above) was discounted for 3639, primarily due to limited detailed information being available at this time, which until resolved would, we believe, have considerably delayed the project. Continuing research on the use of Toplights in ambulance trains will however continue as we have recently discovered that 3631 and possibly 3665, both in our fleet, may have also served as part of such trains; results of this research will serve to direct how we might restore both of these coaches in the future.

Chris Austin (Trust President) and John Waters



3639 in the shed at Washford

RAIL200

The WSR joined some 50 plus other Heritage Railways welcoming in 2025 and the year of RAIL200 with a Whistle Up held at noon on New Year's Day.

The WSR planning team met recently and many joint events are planned for the coming year and into 2026. Some of the events will be PLC led with others shared between the Association and the Trust. The Association has produced history story boards for all the stations up the line.

We are welcoming Peter's Trains author Chris Vine in April at the museum, then in August the Emerald Ant production team will be performing The Iguanodon Restaurant in the area behind the museum.

There will be a series of lectures in the communities along the line. Other events in still in the final planning stages include a performance of a musical piece composed specifically for the WSR, a Garden Party, and Wildlife Trains linked with a Wildlife trail in the station house gardens.

Many other events are in the planning stage so watch this space!

The Gauge Museum: Two venues – One museum

Bishops Lydeard

Although this is the 'closed' season the team has been anything but closed. The MODES and cataloging team, of Peter, Alan and Mike have been working apace to get all the artefacts transferred from the previous ACCESS system across to MODES, which is the UK's most widely used collection management system. As at date of writing, they have recorded in excess of 3000 artefacts with several hundred still waiting!

Our newest volunteer, Andy, has spent several Sundays videoing the interior of 9038 and some of the artefacts with a view to producing a 'virtual tour' through 9038 enabling our less mobile visitors to enjoy the beauty and history of this unique railway carriage. The artefact videos are to enable us to produce a series of "shorts" for our social media sites to promote the Trust in general and the museum in particular.

A virtual tour video of the model railway will be shot soon again to enable those who cannot make it upstairs to enjoy the layout. The Model Railway team just need to complete the work on rebuilding the branch line section. The videos will have captions to enable those with hearing impairment to be fully immersed in our museum. These moves are to make our museum as fully accessible as is possible when working in a 100+ year old building designed to house goods, not people and artefacts!

Our 'fabric' team of John and David working with Alan have designed and costed a new entrance into 9038 allowing for a full "one-way" system for viewing the carriage. Their next role is to design and cost out the planned 'welcome and retail centre'.

Blue Anchor

The team of John, John, David and Richard have worked very hard over the winter often against the obstacles that the weather has thrown at them, but we are now in a position to be planning to reopen at the beginning of the season in March.

If you are local and would like to join us as a volunteer in the museum as a steward, or as part of our fabric team or Learning and Education team please contact us.

Look for photos and updates on these exciting upgrades in future editions of the newsletter.

Ian Camp

Education and learning in 2025

2025 is an exciting year for our Education and Learning Programme.

Right now, we are busy putting the finishing touches to our special Rail 200 learning packs for primary schools, which will be available all year to download for free from both the WSRHT and the WSR websites. Focussing on the WSR's proud history as a broad-gauge line, the packs contain the instructions and resources needed to conduct two different STEM investigations into why Brunel chose broad gauge.

This year also sees the Trust take up the gauntlet in the battle against Climate Change. We have recently received funding from the Arts Council and Museum Development SouthWest, to take



part in the 'Talking Nature' project, working with local schools to develop an outdoor learning environment where young people can learn more about biodiversity and the natural world and the positive impact that they can make in protecting these. Building on the success of the Wild Escape project last year, we will be transforming the garden space outside Station House into an outdoor exhibition and sanctuary for wildlife, encouraging our visitors both young and old to learn more about the different organisms that make their home along our railway.

200 years ago, the creation of the railways left us with a rather surprising legacy when workers digging in preparation for tracklaying discovered a range of fossils and other curious finds. Many of the discoveries during this period added to our knowledge about palaeolithic times and the creatures who lived then. In celebration of this little known role that railways played, we are teaming up with creative arts company Emerald Ant, to take part in 'Iggly for All' a project which aims to link museums such as ours with local SEND schools, providing training for our volunteers on how they can work to support young people with diverse needs as well as ideas for activities to promote engagement.

The project comes to an exciting climax for us on 21st June, when The Gauge Museum at Bishops Lydeard will be hosting 'Dino Day': welcoming 'Iggly' the Iguanodon on site for two exciting performances from the Iguanodon Restaurant. Each show lasts for 40 minutes and tells the story



Iggy for All – Emerald Ant

of the birth of geology in a fast and furious romp through 60 years of scientific discovery. As the story unfolds eccentric characters emerge from history: Mary Anning, Sir Richard Owen, Baron George Cuvier and the Godfather of Geology, William Smith.



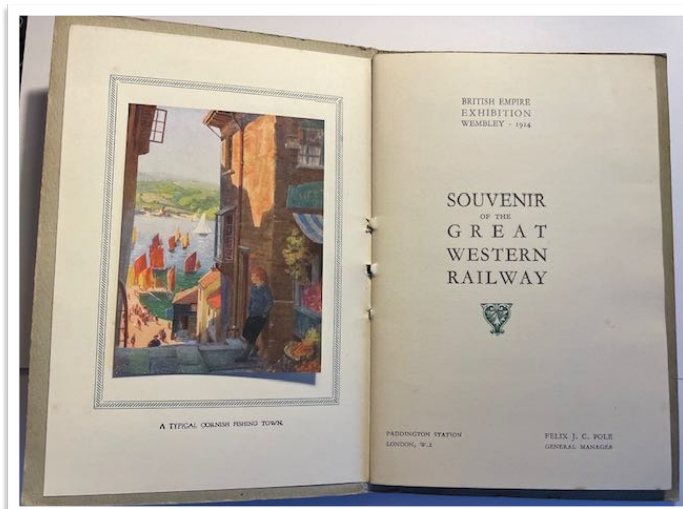
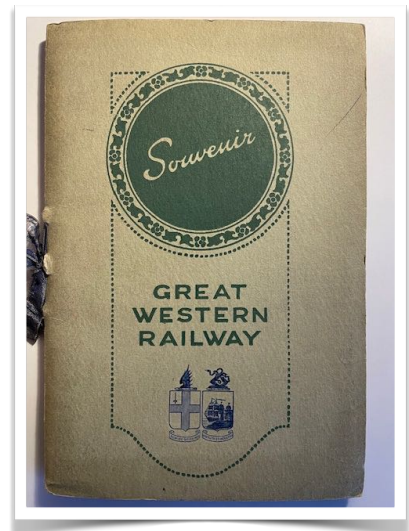
The Iguanodon Restaurant – Emerald Ant

Helen Anson

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From the Archive

Our cataloguing team have been working hard over the 'closed' season transferring information across to the MODES computer system. This is in preparation for our application for accreditation. Our artefacts now entered into the MODES system number over 3000.



New artefacts recently received include a GWR

British Empire Exhibition catalogue dated 1924, then more recently a ticket from Paddington to Taunton and Taunton to Minehead on the last day of British Rail operation of the line.

Ian Camp

An update on Carriage Restoration at Washford

The fit-out of the workshops at Washford has largely been completed and all machine tools are now fully operational having all been connected to the dust extraction system. The first round of machine-tools safety training has been completed, with most of the team now having been trained. The next training session will be in the first quarter next year, when those needing training or a refresher will have the opportunity to take part.



5131 in Washford Yard

carriages in our fleet; these will be preserved. When the bulk of the wooden body has been removed the chassis will be moved over to the far siding in the yard where it will remain accessible for the removal of parts when required.



5856 (Tintern) being hauled on to the trailer for its 100yd journey across Williton Yard

Fortunately, we have spares for these parts; we recovered the draw bars and two coupling hooks from 5131, and we have the other coupling hook and buffers in our spares stock. These parts will be fitted by the team prior to their move to Washford.

Work on 6705 continues. Guttering has now been fitted to the other side of the carriage, and most of the screw holes have now been filled and sanded. One side of the carriage has already been primed, with second side soon to follow.

5131, one of our coaches stabled at Dunster, moved last quarter to Washford. It now resides on shed lane #3 on the far side of the yard. It is likely that the carriage will be scrapped as the chassis is beyond repair. However, 5131 does contain many parts that could provide useful spares for other

At the time of writing, we are in the process of moving the five remaining carriages at Williton to Washford. These have now been moved on to the track at Williton and temporarily parked in Williton station to await their onward journey to Washford towards the end of January. One of these carriages is missing its draw bars and coupling hooks, and another, one set of buffers and a coupling hook.



Tintern being offloaded onto Williton siding

We have ordered a custom-designed access tower to permit safe working on the carriage roof. Once this has been installed, we will be able to paint the roof and repair any leaking joints that we find.

As for braking, work is nearing completion on the emergency pull and DA valves. We are now investigating the provision of a warning signal in the guard’s compartment to indicate when the hand brake is set while the brake vacuum is applied.

We have also started work on the Maintenance and Overhaul (M&O) Documentation for 6705, which is a pre-requisite for its use in service on the railway.



Horse box body in Washford Yard

The Horsebox body has been moved from Bishops Lydeard to Washford. When funding is available, the HCP team will restore the body and have the PLC prepare a suitable chassis.

With 3639 now in the shed, the team had its first opportunity to inspect parts of the carriage hitherto inaccessible when it was outside and under tarpaulins. Details of the corner posts and their attachment to the cant rail can now be determined, and this has enabled the drawings of the corner posts and end wall to be corrected and so allow their manufacture to proceed.

We have been investigating how we can best manufacture the carriage’s exterior doors. There are 16 of these, all identical, and apart from some of the component parts at the top of the doors, all need replacing. Examination of the doors shows that their design is extremely complex – far more so than anything we have encountered so far. Each door is made of over 40 separate parts some of which are particularly detailed. The door pillars for example will require over 30 separate machining operations, with their features requiring over 100 dimensions to fully specify the design, all of which must be accurately reproduced.



CNC-cut jig



Panel post machined using jig

This task will present the team with a considerable challenge, and we have been working on a solution that hopefully will dramatically improve this situation using CNC-cut templates that we derive directly from the 3D model of the door that we are creating. We then propose to use these templates with a suitable jig and our router to machine all the major features of the pillars. To test this approach, we have made one of the curved components of the wall panels using this

process and shown that we can achieve accuracies of +/- 2 thousands of an inch, which is far, far better than we could expect using a conventional ruler and pencil approach.

Finally, over the next quarter, the team's focus will be on completing 6705, to make it available for service on the WSR. We are also planning to run our Woodworking Machine Tools Safety Course in late February, so if you are interested in volunteering with us, now would be a good time to start!

John Waters

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Corporate and Business Developments

Business Plan 2024-26: The Trust Board is in the process of reviewing progress with the current Business Plan and will make any adjustments to priorities, projects and programmes ready for the new operating season from March 2025 onwards. Any significant changes will be notified to Members in future Newsletters.

Review of Leases with the PLC: With the changes brought about by the acquisition of Washford and other developments, we will be reviewing the leases signed in 2017 principally for the use of Bishop Lydeard Gauge Museum and Blue Anchor Museum with the PLC. These need updating because they include for example reference to the use of Williton! We are anticipating some adjustments to the charging regime particularly around energy costs at Bishops Lydeard.

Accreditation: As reported elsewhere in this newsletter, we are making good progress with the process of preparing to apply for accreditation from the Arts Council for our Museum at Bishops Lydeard. The focus the moment is on completing our policy and procedures work as well as having an independently conducted access audit for people with a range of different disabilities. The subsequent report will inform how we improve access not just to the building but also to the wider range of services (physical and electronic) provided by the Trust. The indicative target is to be in a position to make our application by the middle of 2025.

Fundraising 2025: Now that we have reached a decision on the preferred option for restoring Carriage 3639, we are establishing a formal Fundraising campaign and working group to seek external funding to complement the resources available for this project within the Trust. The total 'ask' for restoration of 3639 is just over £150,000 but the final figure will depend on the precise specification. Members will be provided with more information in early 2025 with a view to supporting the project.

We are also returning to the question of a covered canopy on the Cattle Dock at Bishops Lydeard for the purposes of being able to display a second coach and possibly a small goods vehicle under cover. Discussions with the PLC will recommence in 2025. We have the initial architectural drawings that were prepared in 2023 and these will need be costed subject to technical clearance from the PLC Engineering Director and final support from their Board.

Steve Williams

Meet the Trustees

In the summer newsletter, we introduced John Robinson and John Waters. This time, we introduce two other relatively new Trustees, Martin Brown (who joined the Board in 2021) and Ian Camp (who joined in 2022).

Martin Brown



I was born In Birmingham (and remain a keen Aston Villa and Bears fan). I studied Mechanical Engineering (Sheffield), did an MA in Industrial Relations (Warwick) followed by 2 years Post Grad research into the Health and Safety at Work Act (Imperial). I joined the Health and Safety Executive in 1979 and then moved to Her Majesty's Railway Inspectorate in 1997. I left regulating and started managing, when I joined Tube Lines as Health and Safety Director, delivering maintenance and upgrades on London Underground, before moving to London Rail where I oversaw bringing into use the newly built London Overground and finally on to Crossrail.

When I retired, I moved to Somerset and joined the WSR PLC as the Safety and Compliance Director, leaving in 2021 to join the Trust. In the Trust, I hold the Health, Safety and Environment portfolio and I am currently helping write and embed the documentation for the Restoration Team at Washford and more recently for the Gauge Museum. Eventually I want to have as much that is common between the two sites as we can achieve.

I think there are two big achievements for me in the next year. First I want to see the Carriage Restoration Team fully operational at Washford, allowing them to speed up their already excellent work, so they can get closer to seeing our heritage vehicles running on the West Somerset Railway. Secondly I want to help the Museum in their journey to accreditation with all the benefits this will bring.

We are at the start of a really exciting period for the Trust, which will turn all our potential into real achievements. The Heritage Trust can be a model for heritage railways across the country and will allow its excellent members to feel a real sense of achievement. Restoring and retaining our heritage is important and together we can make a real difference.

Ian Camp

I have been involved in sales and marketing all my working life, from training in the retail sector, with Marley Tile company, then moving into more specialist sectors I worked with Dunlop in the Marine Safety Division as UK sales manager before becoming general sales manger responsible for supplying life rafts etc that met various international maritime legal standards for shipping across the world. Finally I worked with SISIS, a



specialist sports ground maintenance machinery manufacturer, in the international Sales Manager role.

My main reason for joining Trust was that, on moving back from 21 years in the USA, my wife suggested that I might like to volunteer on the WSR knowing my love of trains. I joined the Trust initially as a museum steward and have made many new friends, learnt a lot and look forward to yet more. I would love to see the Trust grow its membership substantially both in the UK and overseas enabling it to offer a larger, more inclusive experience for museums visitors and volunteers.

What do I most enjoy about being part of the Heritage Trust? The friendship and broad knowledge from a great cast of trustees and volunteers.

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Membership Matters

The Trust currently has just over 100 members. Those of you who pay your membership subscription by monthly direct debit or annually in January should now have received your membership cards for 2025. If you have not, please contact Chris Bolt (chris.bolt@wsrht.co.uk).

Just over than half of members pay their subscription annually. Although a couple of years ago we encouraged 'annual' members to move their renewal date to 1 January, most 'annual' renewals are still paid on the anniversary of the date of joining the Trust, which is in line with the Membership Rules put in place in 2016. Trustees recently reviewed these Rules, and decided to retain the current arrangements. So 'annual' members will receive a membership card running for 12 months from their renewal date.

Further information about the work of the Trust can be found on the Trust's website www.wsrht.co.uk.

If you have moved 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, with particular thanks to John Waters, Helen Anson and Ian Camp.

Recruit a new member ... or two ... or more!

Members of the Trust play an important role both in determining the Trust's future plans and in helping to support the Trust financially. Apart from the benefit of knowing that you are supporting the preservation of railway heritage, members can get a 25% discount on rail travel and 10% discount on WSR shop sales on showing a valid membership card.

Currently, the Trust has just over 100 members. We could double this if every member was able to recruit one additional member in 2025.

So this is our challenge to all members - can you recruit at least one additional member in 2025?

At the end of the year, the member who has managed to recruit the most new members will receive a prize!

Membership forms are available on the website (<https://www.wsrht.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/Membership.pdf>) or from the Membership Secretary.