



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, together with a summary of the Q&A session and the draft minutes.

The newsletter also includes the report on carriage restoration given at the meeting by John Waters, and an update on museum activities from the Museum Curator, Ian Camp.

The next 'regular' edition of the newsletter will be sent out early in the New Year. This will include more detail on the Trust's plans for 2026.

Chris Bolt
Membership Secretary

Chairman's report to AGM

It was good to welcome so many of you to the Trust's AGM at the end of September.

In my Chairman's report to the meeting, I started by saying that, overall, the railway had had a challenging year. Passenger numbers were down and costs have risen reflecting the operating and financial environment being experienced by many other heritage railways across the UK. The visit of the Flying Scotsman brought some additional benefits as did the weather, although some trackside fire incidents such as that at Washford over August Bank Holiday were not helpful either to the railway or to relationships with the local community. The Trust is working with the PLC to look at how we can assist the company whilst operating within our own Objects and Powers.

From my point of view as Chairman, the completion, passing fitness to run and the first ever operation of Coach 6705 was the highlight of the year. The coach has proven that it can run successfully on the WSR and, coupled to the Severn Valley Railway vehicle during the Spring Gala, was a sight to see. It was particularly pleasing that Members and Volunteers of the Trust had the opportunity to ride in the coach as part of the special train behind Fenchurch which ran on the Thursday immediately prior to the Gala.

In addition to this, the Trust now has its first formal hire agreement with the PLC for the use of the coach during the 40s weekend and the Autumn Steam Gala.

The Trust played its part in the hosting of Flying Scotsman with the locomotive stabled in the Cattle Dock at BL with visitors coming through the Gauge Museum to access the area on a strict ticketing basis. Particular tribute is due to the stewards who were present over that period and who handled the additional numbers really well.



The emerging position on legacies is clearly something that the Trust Board is coming to terms with and which had to be reflected in the 2024 accounts to comply with financial rules. This is why AC Mole have been appointed as the Trust's auditors following a formal recruitment process. The changing financial position is potentially transformative for the charity and the implications are massive in terms of what the Trust can now achieve in terms of delivering on our Business Plan objectives.

In my remarks to the meeting, I paid tribute to the work of the Board over the last 12 months and am particularly grateful for the support and work of Steve Williams and Don Fraser in helping to navigate the changes involved after receipt of the legacies and to prepare to take advantage of the opportunities that this will give the charity.

The Rail 200 National Exhibition Train will be visiting the WSR between the 24 and 29 November and will be stabled in the bay platform. The Gauge Museum will be opened for visitors and the Trust will play its part in supporting the PLC during this period.

Although visitor numbers to the museum were slightly down for 2025, volunteer numbers were up both in the Gauge Museum and at Washford. It has been really pleasing, after such a long period of frustration, to see the Museum at Blue Anchor finally opened to visitors during 2025. The formal opening will take place in early 2026, once the last phase of enhancements had been completed. Again, I paid tribute to the hard work of the project team at Blue Anchor including John Anson, Richard Gibbs, John Flippance and Helen Anson. The support and input given by the Blue Anchor station team under the leadership of Robin Wichard is also most appreciated.

I concluded my remarks by referring to the project development work being led by the Trust at Bishops Lydeard with regard to the Covered Canopy Cattle Dock scheme (led by Steve Williams) and the proposed Visitor Centre in the Platform 2 car park for which Chris Darke is the Project Manager. There will be further information to follow as these schemes progress.

Mike Thompson – Chairman WSRHT

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Vice-Chairman and Company Secretary's remarks

At the AGM, Steve Williams gave Members an update on the work connected with legacies and progress with the current Trust business agenda. (A further update is provided later in this newsletter.)

Steve noted that Members now know that the Trust is in receipt of a number of legacies one of which is in excess of £2.7 million. Following a special meeting of the Trust Board in November 2024, a programme of work was established which led to:

- Appointment of auditors following a competitive tendering process. The full audit is necessary to comply with financial rules specifying that legacies had to be reported in the financial year in which they were notified.
- The development of an Investment Policy and supporting documentation which will enable the Trust to go out to the market to invite tenders for and Independent Financial Adviser/Wealth

Management Adviser. Nine organisations have been identified following recommendations from our auditors, lawyers and bank. The intention is to receive proposals by the end of October, review and interview in November followed by recommendations to the Board. It is hoped that the preferred provider will be in place by the end of the calendar year.

- The development of a Procurement Policy which provides additional financial and planning discipline and assurance around the decision-making processes for significant expenditure including requirement for formal quotations and/or business cases.
- The establishment of a Finance and Investment Committee. The four Trustee Members are Mike Thompson, Don Fraser, Helen Anson and Steve Williams. This is a formal Sub Committee of the Board and has had one initial meeting.
- The preparation of an Investment Plan which will be finalised with the successful IFA provider and will identify levels of funding for day-to-day operational expenditure, short-term and medium-term investments.

One of the positive consequences of the changing financial position is that the Trust will be able to afford to support more of its own business objectives without necessarily having to seek external fundraising, although this will still be a requirement for the larger schemes. The 2026 Business Plan refresh will enable the Board to have a formal Capital Programme of which the Covered Canopy and Visitor Centre schemes are examples of two projects in development. There is more to come at Washford and the Trust needs to complete its work at Blue Anchor Museum.

Inevitably however all this comes with additional costs, the most recent example is audit fees which are significantly greater than those paid for independent examination. The levels of fees paid are likely to continue going forward given the changed financial status and there is little that the Trust can do to avoid this.

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Member Questions and Answers

John Anson sought reassurance that, given the legacies received, the Board and volunteers would continue to treat visitors with respect and consideration given that they may be the donors in the future both in terms of money and artefacts. Mike Thompson confirmed that this was very much how the Trust operated now and in the future, a commitment backed up by Ian Camp (Museum Curator).

Alan Clifford asked what the Trust was doing about the lack of welfare facilities on Platform 1 at Bishops Lydeard. Ian Camp replied that a scheme was under development to establish modern facilities including a Changing Places facility for disabled access and that he had just completed positive discussions with the PLC General Manager and Head of Infrastructure. The proposed solution was not cheap but reflected today's public expectations and was also being pursued in response to the external Access Audit undertaken in January 2025. Steve Williams said that the cost of the proposals when agreed by the Board would form part of the Covered Canopy scheme in terms of the approach to funding.

Geoff Evens asked if it was intended to do anything about the roof of the metal extension to the Gauge Museum given the recent experience of multiple leaks. Ian Camp confirmed that discussions had taken place with the PLC and that arrangements were being made to use the “cherry picker” in order to affect repairs as soon as possible.

John Anson asked whether anything was being done to improve access for disabled people between platforms 1 and 2 at the northern end of Bishops Lydeard. Steve Williams said that this had been identified as an issue in the External Access Audit but that responsibility for taking forward the recommendations from the audit lies with the PLC. Given their current financial situation it was unlikely that this would be a priority in the short term and it may well be that it was something that the Trust would need to help the company with.

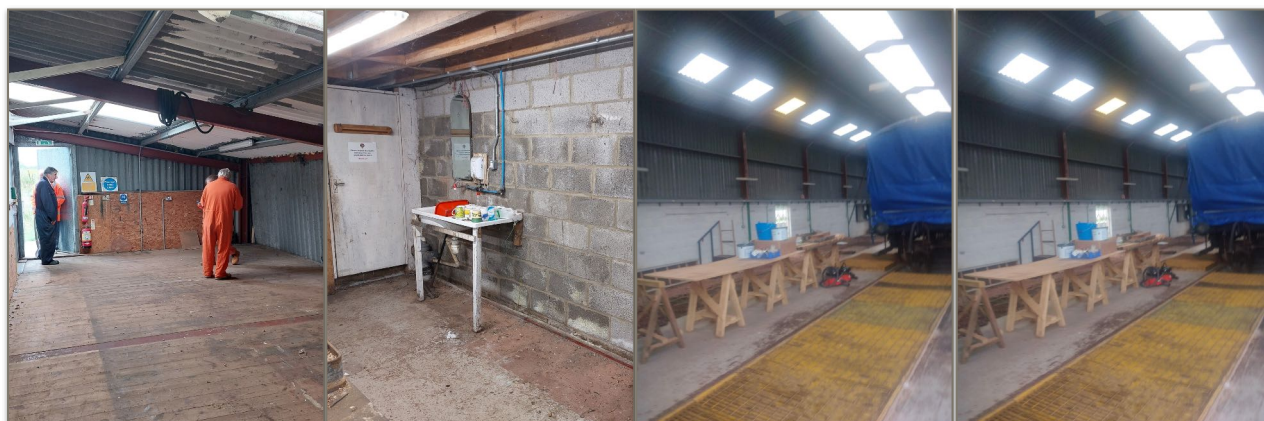
Alan Clifford asked if there were plans to open Washford more regularly to visitors. John Waters said that the Engineering Centre would certainly be open under supervision during the Autumn Steam Gala. However, given the nature of activities at Washford, it was not intended to open on a regular basis. Mike Thompson said that, unfortunately, it would not be possible to hold a shunting display during the gala but this was something that would be kept under review for future special events.

Carol Lockton commented on how successful the provision of a ramp from the Cattle Dock was for visitors with mobility issues was in relation to the Flying Scotsman visit. There had been lots of positive feedback and the meeting paid tribute to John Flippance for its construction and installation which was achieved at short notice. Members also gave their appreciation to Grass Mats for the provision of matting over the Cattle Dock during the visit which was made available free of charge.

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Presentation by John Waters on carriage restoration at Washford

We took on the lease at Washford in February 2024, when the workshop looked like this:



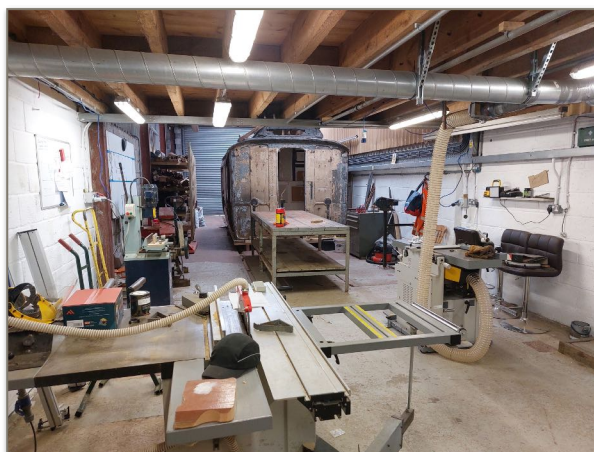
Since then, we have undertaken a wide range of activities including:

- Investment in tools and equipment to support restoration work
- All carriages now moved to Washford
- Completion of 6705
- Continuation of work on 3639
- Progress on restoration of 9037
- Start on build of welfare facility.

And there is an ever-growing team of volunteers!

The workshops have taken shape, with:

- Walls cleaned and painted
- Investment in equipment
 - Sliding Table Saw
 - Morticer
 - Planer Thicknesser
 - Bandsaw
 - Belt sander
 - Mitre saws
- Dust Extraction to all machines
- Air compressor commissioned



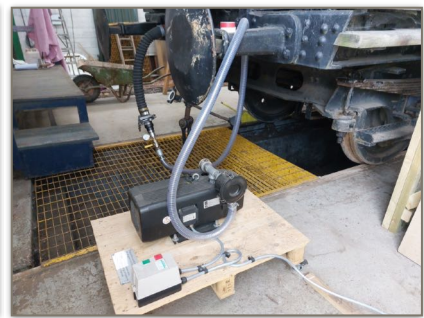
Moving the carriages involved careful planning and execution:

- Carriages at Williton had first to be moved onto the tracks
- Carriages moved slowly from both Dunster and Williton
- The PLC provided expert help to achieve this safely and without incident.



Work on 6705 has been completed:

- Bodywork repainted
- Gutters refitted with seals
- Internal water damage repaired
- Brakes refurbished and tested
- Roof painted.



It had its debut on WSR at the 2025 Spring gala.

We have continued work on 3639:

- Roof supported and walls being removed
- Chassis – rust removal, rust stabilization and painting
- Bottom sides being morticed
- Doors: 3D model created and doors being made
 - First one nearing completion
- Brake components being refurbished.





We are also making progress on 9037:

- Compartment-side wall completed and panelled
- Corridor-side wall frame now being restored.
- Preparing to remove unwanted part of roof.



And finally:

- Container storage is in place with more planned
- Build of welfare facility underway
- Mess room and kitchenette
- Two WCs – one of which will be for disabled
- Office

And we now have 16 volunteers!

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Update on Business Planning

Trust Business Plan

The Business Plan will be refreshed for 2026 and beyond between now and March. This will obviously take account of the changed financial position of the charity and will include a defined capital programme for the first time.

Investment Programme

The Trust now has a formal Investment Policy and has established a Finance and Investment Committee (FIC) as a formal Sub Committee of the Board. FIC is working on developing an Investment Plan for implementation from 2026 and will be responsible for oversight and assessment of large quotations and business cases. The Trust Board has invited tenders from nine organisations recommended variously by our bank, solicitors and auditors for the role of Independent Financial Adviser/Wealth Manager. It is intended that interviews take place in November with recommendations to the Board such that we have the preferred provider in place by the end of December.

Museum Accreditation

We have an assessment visit from the Arts Council on 15 October and we will follow the process from there to hopefully secure a successful outcome.

Corporate Risk Register and Action Plan

The updated Register has been presented to the Board together with an Action Plan. A small subgroup will take forward the Action Plan. Thanks go primarily to Martin Brown for all his hard work in this area.

Procurement Policy

The Trust has a new Procurement Policy. This sets out the arrangements for the process by which approval to expenditure at various financial limits can be secured together with the methodology for business case development for large schemes in excess of £10,000 per project.

Covered Canopy Cattle Dock Project-Bishops Lydeard

A specification for the scheme has been sent to LHC Architects who were responsible for the original larger Gauge Museum extension proposals in 2022. We have asked them to quote for planning, design, outline construction and project management costs. This will then be subject to a formal business case following the steps required in the Procurement Policy.

Steve Williams - Vice Chairman and Company Secretary

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Museum update

In the past year, a great deal has happened in and around the museum. I would like to report that it has all been positive but along with most other attractions our footfall is marginally down, but in all other areas some positive advances have been made.

The major positive step was the reopening of Blue Anchor after what can only be described as 3 long years of hard work by a very dedicated team of volunteers. They battled against weather issues, major water ingress just to name a few, but thanks to them we have a museum to be proud of and is much appreciated by the visitors based on the comments left in our visitors' book.



We have welcomed three new volunteers into the museum team this year, and the model railway team have also seen a growth in their volunteer numbers. Such has been the increase in the model rail group's numbers they have been able to open the model railway much more than in past years and this has been appreciated primarily by our visitors but also by the stewarding team.

We have introduced a "one way" system through 9038, which makes for a much easier visitor flow and has been well received. The visitor has the option of taking a "walk-through" descriptive sheet with them, giving them the story of the carriage and what to look for whilst walking through the carriage.



Thanks to our friends at STEAM Swindon, we have added to our family of mannequins, which have been the subject of many a comment, the occasional shriek, because they are so lifelike, plus they are the subject of many a photograph.

During the much-vaunted visit of the Flying Scotsman the museum was pleased to host the loco on "non running days" in the bay platform and the entry and exit was through the museum introducing many to our museum for the first time. Access to the footplate was from the cattle dock and a team of volunteers worked hard to get it cleared and ready for our visitors. Thanks to the generosity of GRASSMATS UK we were able to lay down safety matting for the visitors.

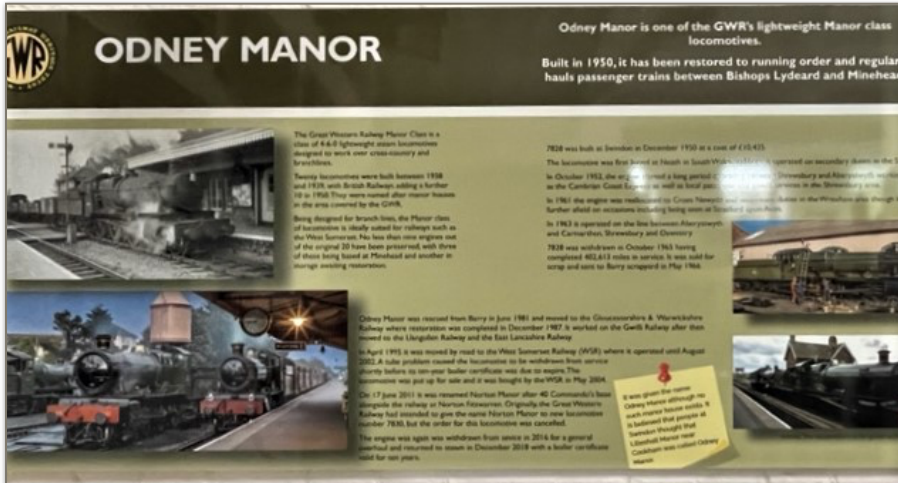
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The Trust was pleased to welcome Chris Vine, author of Peter’s Railway children’s books to the museum for a two day “Young Engineers” event. Such was the success, tickets sold out in 48 hours of going on sale, so that another visit is in planning stage for 2026.

We plan to enhance the emergency exit from the museum to the cattle dock area, enabling those less mobile visitors to visit the cattle dock and garden more easily. The cattle dock and garden area now has picnic tables for our visitors to enjoy watching the trains and enjoy the gardens which Carol and the gardening team, working alongside Helen our education officer, is making into a Victorian garden with an emphasis on encouraging wildlife.

On the lower floor, as part of celebrating RAIL200, we have story boards telling the story of rail



over the past 200 years. We also have storyboards to commemorate the various locos on the WSR, both steam and diesel. All new storyboards are designed on an easy change over system, that way we can keep the museum fresher for our regular visitors, of whom we have increasingly more.

Over Winter 2025, we have the pleasure of co-hosting, with the PLC, the Network Rail “Inspiration Exhibition Train” when the museum will be open and offering support education facilities to the PLC and the Network Rail education team. I think this will be the first occasion that the museum has been open to the public in November!

Future plans include providing a virtual tour through 9038 and up to the model railway, again to enable our less mobile visitors to enjoy the full museum. New display boards are planned along with a new welcome area.

The big change that is planned over the winter is the upgrading of the electrics in the museum to a give us more efficient lighting, more power outlets and above all heating in certain areas!

Ian Camp - Museum Curator

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 members.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 and Ian Camp.

Draft AGM minutes

WEST SOMERSET RAILWAY HERITAGE TRUST LIMITED

Registered Charity No. 265564

President: Mr Christopher Austin OBE

Registered Office: The Railway Station, Bishops Lydeard Taunton, Somerset. TA4 3BX

Registered in England No. 1079916

www.wsrht.co.uk

Minutes of the AGM held on Saturday 27th September 2025 at 10.00 AM in Bishops Lydeard Village Hall

The meeting was formally opened by Mike Thompson Trust Chairman. All members of the Trust Board were present with the exception of Ian Coleby who gave his apologies and who nominated the Company Secretary to vote on the Resolutions on their behalf.

The Chairman handed over to the Company Secretary to run the formal part of the AGM.

Resolutions were considered as follows:

1. To Approve and Adopt the Minutes of the 2024 Annual General Meeting

There were 27 Members in attendance and 11 Member Proxy Votes. 38 Members voted in favour. There were no abstentions and no Members voted against. The Resolution was therefore Carried.

2. To Approve and Adopt the 2024 Company Financial Statements and Report of the Directors and the Report of the Auditors.

There were 27 Members in attendance and 11 Member Proxy Votes. 38 Members voted to Approve the Resolution. There were no abstentions and nobody voted against. The Resolution was therefore Carried.

Retirement and Election of Directors

3) Retirement-Michael Thompson

In accordance with the Articles of Association, Mr Michael Thompson put himself forward for re-election. There were 27 Members in attendance and 11 Member Proxy Votes. 38 Members voted to Approve the re-election of Mr Michael Thompson. There were no abstentions and nobody voted against. Mr Thompson was duly re-elected to the Trust Board.

4) Retirement-Donald Fraser

In accordance with the Articles of Association, Mr Donald Fraser put himself forward for re-election. There were 27 members in attendance and 11 Member Proxy Votes. 38 members voted to Approve the re-election of Mr Donald Fraser. There were no abstentions and nobody voted against. Mr Fraser was duly re-elected to the Trust Board.

5) Retirement-John Waters

In accordance with the Articles of Association, Mr John Waters put himself forward for re-election. There were 27 Members in attendance and 11 Proxy Votes. 38 Members voted to Approve the re-election of Mr John Waters. There were no abstentions and nobody voted against. Mr Waters was duly re-elected to the Trust Board.

6) Election-Mr Christopher Darke

Mr Christopher Darke was co-opted to the Board in April 2025 and has offered himself for election. There were 27 Members in attendance and 11 Member Proxy Votes. 38 Members voted to Approve the election of Mr Christopher Darke. There were no abstentions and nobody voted against. Mr Darke was duly elected to the Trust Board.

The formal business of the AGM was then concluded.

Steve Williams

Company Secretary