

WEST SOMERSET STEAM RAILWAY TRUST

In this issue

Welcome to the second of our newsletters updating you on the work of the West Somerset Steam Railway Trust. We are grateful for feedback on the first edition, and hope that you find something of interest in this one.

The main article in this issue continues with the theme of the First World War. There is also an update on the Museum at Blue Anchor Station, and a report on the AGM.

As before, any feedback would be welcome.

Annual General Meeting

The Trust's Annual General Meeting was held at the Gauge Museum on 25 May. As well as giving an opportunity to give updates on the work of the Trust, there was some formal business to conduct, including re-election of Directors.

On this occasion, new Articles for the Trust (which is a charitable company, limited by guarantee) were presented and approved.

(Continued on next page)



Horses and mules by rail to Minehead!

Did you know that the West Somerset Railway played an important role in the First World War transporting mules from Shirehampton, near Avonmouth, to Bratton Court Farm, on the slopes of North Hill at Minehead?

The story was told in a BBC programme in June, which also featured the Horse Box under restoration at Bishops Lydeard.

Despite some mechanisation, the First World War was still one where horses featured large, hauling supplies and artillery. Many were bought from their owners in Britain. But the demand was so high - the British Army was using nearly one million horses and mules by 1918 - that significant numbers had to be imported, in particular from the United States.

At its peak, the Remount Depot at Shirehampton was importing over one thousand horses and mules from the US every week. The depot there accommodated over seven thousand animals in 64 stable blocks and 35 paddocks. But it needed more space for imported animals to recover from their journey, to be trained and, where necessary, shod.



(AGM continued)

We have used model Articles published by the Charity Commission, with only minor amendments (some of which reflect guidance from the Heritage Railway Association on the structure of Boards for bodies running or associated with heritage railways). As the Trust's Articles had not been changed since 1972 a lot of updating was needed! One example is to confirm that Notices can be issued by email or publicised on the Trust's website.

The Trust's Objects have not been changed from the original wording, as any such change would require Charity Commission approval.

New membership rules

The new Articles allow the Trust to establish new membership rules. These were also agreed at the AGM by the current full members (which the previous Articles limited to a maximum of 50).

We have introduced a single category of membership. Anyone making a minimum donation to the Trust of £2.50 per month (or £30 per year) automatically becomes a full member, with voting rights at general meetings.

On the basis of these new rules, which can only be changed by the members at a general meeting, the Trust now has 45 members.

To do this, it used twelve rail-connected farms in Somerset. Bratton Court was one of these, and accommodated 500 mules at a time, staying for three weeks or more. To feed them needed six tons of hay a day!



Mules came by rail to Minehead, and were then taken through the town to the farm.

They were transported in converted horse boxes - a horse box which previously carried two horses and a groom could carry up to six mules.



Only one horse box of the era survives. It was built for the LNWR and found on a farm at Pershore.

It is now being restored at Bishops Lydeard by a team led by Keith Sandford under the aegis of the WSSRT.



The museum by the sea

One of the Trust's activities is running the museum at Blue Anchor station. This was originally the idea of Peter and Ginny Barnfield, and was officially opened on Sunday 14 July 1985. So it celebrates its 30th anniversary next year! The late Major General Errol Lonsdale, the former Army Transport Officer-in-Chief 'cut the ribbon' and declared the Museum open.



The Museum building itself is on the down platform, and was the former GWR 1904 Waiting Room. It is not an ideal home for a Museum - no damp proof

course, with the flags laid on bare earth, and situated at the bottom of a steep bank with a ditch running along the top which acts as a water shed for a rather large field, inclined at times to overflow! In Autumn 2009, the low retaining wall at the rear of the Museum 'moved' into the back wall of the building, fortunately with doing any major damage. The wall was rebuilt, and shortly after the canopy renewed - thanks to John Baines and RAMS - so a few years on we are still just about seaworthy ... although there is always work to do!



We mainly display artefacts relating to the GWR or

BR(W), although there is an occasional interloper. The Museum's reserves allow the Trust to purchase items, particularly of local

interest, while some are on loan from various individuals to whom we are very grateful.



New items for this season include a single line crossing repeater, a 'gate locked/unlocked' instrument, large and small brass lookout man's and shunter's horns, GWR leather cash bags from Dunster, Bishops Lydeard and East Ansty and a small collection of pay cheques. Hopefully some other items will be added during the season.

So it is many thanks to all, both present and past, who have helped the Museum in any capacity - no volunteers means the Museum cannot open - but we are quietly confident the we will keep going a while longer!

Pete Treharne - Curator

WWI display boards

From the end of July, the Trust is preparing to mark the huge contribution that the railway made to the war effort a hundred years ago. In particular a fleet of continental ambulance trains was used to move wounded soldiers back from the front line to base hospitals, and ultimately to the ports and home. Display boards at a number of stations are being prepared by Claire Sheppy, and will be on show from the end of July – well worth looking out for.

One of the GWR continental ambulance trains included our own coach 3639 (the one under the green tarpaulin in the North Yard at Williton). We plan shortly to carry out remedial work on the headstocks and underframe to allow the vehicle to be moved around so that restoration work can start.

Do you have any stories, photographs or other articles relating to the West Somerset Railway during World War I? If so, we would be very pleased to hear from you.



Members of the work party on June 22 in front of coach 3639 under its protective tarpaulin, with one of the sample display boards. Left to right: Chris Austin, Tim Randle, Ray Clack, Claire Sheppy, Mike Dunse, Greg McNelly, Jennie Dunse.

Volunteers are welcome, either at our regular weekday sessions – Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays – or at our next Sunday working party on the 27th July between 10.00 and 16.00. The work is undertaken at Williton, in the Tarmac shed and the adjacent yard. Contact Chris Austin for details: austinca2@googlemail.com.

Other news

Update on 6705

Work continues on 6705, the 'American' coach where we have started the task of replacing the windows in specially made wooden frames using the GWR method to ensure they do not leak, and that they look right for passengers. Many of the fastenings for these windows have been recovered from a dismantled Collett coach, and it is very satisfying to see the genuine products that Swindon used back again, doing the job for which they were designed.

Inside, we are cleaning or restoring hundreds of small components, and sourcing a few replacement pieces where they are missing.

Become a member!

There are now no restrictions on the number of Trust members. If you wish to become a member, make an additional donation to the work of the Trust, or to change an existing standing order, please contact the Treasurer, Chris Bolt (cwbolt@gmail.com).

We will be updating our website soon to reflect the new membership arrangements.

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.wssrt.co.uk.

Photo credits: BBC, Chris Bolt, Ryan Pope