

THE MARLOW DONKEY



Edition

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A West Country Weekend
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Living with the West Somerset

The Marlow Donkey

The Magazine of the Marlow & District Railway Society

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The contents of the *Marlow Donkey* represent the views of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the position of the Society

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Front Cover Photographs

All photos: The West Somerset Railway by Tim Edmonds. Article page 16.

Top: 7828 Odney Manor on the 12:35 from Bishops Lydeard.

Middle: Class 33 D6575 on a Diesel Experience Course climbing away from Watchet.

Bottom: Class 09 D4107 on a training special for Goods Guards.

TIMETABLE

FORTHCOMING MEETINGS

All meetings are held in the Bourne End Community Centre, Wakeman Rd, Bourne End at 7.45 for 8.00pm.
(Except June starts 7.30pm)

- Thursday 17 March **EASTLEIGH LOCOMOTIVE WORKS** Colin Boocock
Colin, a retired BR manager, last spoke to the Society in April 2014 on the subject of the Bulleid Pacifics. He returns to look at the works that was responsible for the transformation of those locomotives, among other things and where he spent many years.
- Thursday 21 April **THE WORK OF THE NATIONAL RAILWAY MUSEUM** Anthony Coulls
Anthony is the NRM's Senior Curator of Rail Vehicles and is based at Locomotion, Shildon. He is also Chairman of the National Traction Engine Trust (in his spare time ?). This young man is a great enthusiast and excellent speaker and tonight will give an insight into the work of the museum and its staff.
- Thursday 19 May **MODERN JAPANESE RAILWAYS** Tom Painter & Ian Lake
Tom Painter, Business Development Manager at Chiltern Railways, told about his company last year. Tonight he is joined by colleague Ian Lake, Operations Standards Manager, for a look at the modern railways in Japan and what they can teach us.
- Thursday 16 June **THE INTER-CITY STORY** Chris Green
Chris Green needs no further introduction as probably the most high-profile manager in the rail industry both pre and post-privatisation. Tonight he concentrates on BR's successful Inter-City brand which he lead as Sector Director in the early 1990s. This is a joint meeting with the RCTS and starts at 7.30pm not 8.00pm.

FORTHCOMING VISIT

- Sunday 29 May **GLOUCESTERSHIRE WARWICKSHIRE RAILWAY** by car
We will be making a visit to the G-WR for its annual Cotswold Steam Gala with opportunities to both ride and view the action from the lineside. See Society News for more details.

CHAIRMAN'S NOTES

I have mentioned the forces of nature before in my Chairman's notes and feel that I have to do so again in view of the appallingly wet time we have had over the last few months. Fortunately, down south we have escaped the worst of it this year but one has to feel terribly sorry for those people in the north who have been flooded out once, twice, or even three times during the same winter. There has been a devastating effect on the railway system and I read that the West Coast main line will be closed for two months whilst repairs are carried out to Lamington viaduct, between Crawford and Carstairs, following flood damage. You can imagine the disruption to services this will cause, with Edinburgh and far north services running on the East Coast, some diversions over the Glasgow South Western route, and the inevitable bustitutions. Many other lines also have considerable problems as a result of flooding or landslips.

I was amazed to see the Waterside Inn at Summerseat, on the East Lancs Railway, featured on the TV news for the worst possible reason that it had collapsed into the swollen river that passed beneath it. Given that event, the ELR itself was very lucky to escape relatively unscathed and it too featured on prime-time TV not long afterwards when *Flying Scotsman* made its first runs in steam following its protracted and very expensive overhaul. As you know, I have a soft spot for this loco and I'm very pleased to see it back together and running and as I write this it has been confirmed it has made its main line debut with a successful trip from Crewe to Carlisle via Shap and back on the S&C. I am obviously not alone in my admiration of this old girl and a reputed 20,000 people turned up to see her at the East Lancs and huge crowds were out for the main line

run. This main line special train was obviously very lucky to have been able to return south on the Settle and Carlisle as we now hear that the weather induced landslip north of Armathwaite will result in closure of the line for several months, with the obvious consequences.

Back in the days when 4472 was the only steam loco still allowed to run on the BR network, those of us in search of steam had to turn our attention to the various industrial systems that retained this form of motive power and I spent an awful lot of time at collieries watching dirty but hard-working saddle tanks. There was a real attractiveness for the photographer in the grimy environment of the colliery yard but often, just beyond, the line to the exchange sidings would pass through lovely rural scenery allowing a completely different type of shot. I always found the people I met during those visits to be extremely friendly and was often told to take advantage of the available facilities, such as the canteen and/or pithead baths. In those days in many parts of the country the NCB was totally pervasive and the thought of mining disappearing completely was unimaginable, so the news that the last deep mine in Britain, at Kellingley, had closed left me feeling very sad indeed. How quickly the world changes.

On a much brighter note, it was a great pleasure and privilege to welcome our President, Sir William McAlpine, to our meeting in January, the more so as he was not feeling 100%. I'm sure those of you who were able to attend enjoyed the evening as much as I did and we are very lucky to have such an influential man associated with our Society.

Tim Speechley

SOCIETY AND LOCAL NEWS

PREVIOUS MEETINGS

We were pleased to welcome to welcome our President, Sir William McAlpine in January. Speaking without notes or supporting illustrations, Sir William kept us entertained for the whole evening recounting various aspects of his life-long love of railways including touring the national system with a pair of privately-owned saloons and getting into "situations" which would never be allowed today; his private railway and collection at Fawley; owning that notorious money-pit *Flying Scotsman* and the work of the Railway Heritage Committee. We were particularly pleased he made it as he was somewhat under the weather at the time.

Following the AGM in February we had a most excellent presentation by Kevin West on the construction of the new-build LMS Patriot 5551 *The Unknown Warrior*. Kevin is the project's chief engineer and was therefore able to give us a fascinating insight into what it takes to build a new steam locomotive from scratch for the main line in the 21st century.

In our membership survey last year many asked for more "engineering themed" talks. Well, you certainly got that on this occasion even if some of the more technical aspects went over the heads of a few... A collection was made during the evening which was topped up by the society. Thank you to all those who contributed.

COMMITTEE CHANGES

With the exception of Julian Heard who has retired, the committee was re-elected en-bloc at the AGM. The officers remain unchanged apart from the post of Outings Organiser which has been taken on by Brian Hopkinson.

Julian's retirement has left a vacancy on the committee which we would like to fill. Nobody came forward to offer their services at the AGM but if, on reflection, you might be willing please contact Tim Speechley - we can always co-opt.

NORMAN ASTON-SMITH TROPHY

As usual voting for this took place at the AGM. This year's winner was Mike Walker for his story "Reading: Job Done" (March) followed by Tim Speechley's quarterly Chairman's Notes. There was a three-way tie for third place between Phil Searle's "A Passion For Railways" (March), Tony Caton's "In The Blood" (September) and David Gardner's "Old Gerty" (December).

DONKEY CONTRIBUTIONS

Once again my file of material awaiting publication is virtually empty and therefore I am once again pleading with you for contributions. The results of the NAS trophy show that members' own experiences are popular so how about sharing yours?

Alternatively you might have to put up with more bus articles or a thinner 'Donkey, as editor I neither have the time, or wish to prepare all the articles myself. If every member made one contribution I'd be set up for years!

COTSWOLD FESTIVAL OF STEAM

We are planning a Society visit to the Gloucestershire Warwickshire Railway on Sunday 29th May for its annual Cotswold Festival of Steam, one of the highlights of the gala season. This year they will be marking 175 years of Swindon-built locomotives and in addition to the home fleet there are expected to be three guests all built at Swindon either for the GWR or BR Standards. In addition, the gala will see the return of Merchant Navy 35006 *Peninsular & Oriental SN Co.* to passenger service for the first time since withdrawal in 1967.

The G-WR is a superbly scenic line running through the Cotswolds and has many great places for lineside photography. During our visit, which will be made by car, there will be opportunities not only to ride but also get lineside if you wish - they operate an intensive timetable on these occasions.

If you'd like to join us, please give your name to Brian Hopkinson on 01628 298520 or email him at hopkinson5@talktalk.net. Please let us know if you would like or will provide transport.

A second Society outing is being planned for the autumn with details next time.

SUBSCRIPTIONS: LAST CALL

Whilst it is good to report that the vast majority of you have renewed for 2016, there are as always a few stragglers. Hopefully this is just an oversight but if you are intending to let your membership lapse this is the last 'Donkey' you will receive and we would be interested to know the reasons why. We don't want to lose members so it would be nice to know what we are doing wrong.

RCTS MAIDENHEAD MEETINGS

The Maidenhead & Windsor branch of the RCTS have the following meetings planned for the coming months:

- | | |
|--------------|--|
| Mon 21 March | Extensions to the Underground - Past, Present & Future.
David Leboff and John Kirkup, TfL |
| Mon 25 April | Five and Nine, The Brighton Line
Ron Hart |
| Mon 18 May | Branch AGM followed by members' presentations. |

All meetings are held at the Cox Green Community Centre, Highfield Lane, Cox Green, Maidenhead starting at 19:30 and MDRS members are always welcome to attend.

FAWLEY HILL VINTAGE EXTRAVAGANZA

Sir William and Lady McAlpine are opening up Fawley Hill for another Vintage Extravaganza on Friday 20th to Sunday 22nd May. As usual, in addition to the railway, there will be a fantastic display of road steam engines, vintage cars, trucks and buses, military vehicles, fairground rides and even aircraft. Something for all the family and well worth a visit. For more details go to <http://www.fawleyhill.co.uk/>

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DOUG HILL: No.1 APPRENTICE

During the January meeting we took the opportunity to congratulate member Doug Hill who was celebrating his 80th birthday. He'd given up having a party to attend – there's dedication for you! Back in 1953 Doug went to Spain to compete in a World Skills Apprentice Competition and was a member of the UK Skills team. He won a silver medal for cabinet making and was the FIRST apprentice of UK Skills to win a World Skills medal. Whilst every four years there are the Olympics, every two years there are the Skills Olympics. Seventy countries send their best apprentices in 45 different skills to a host country which in 2009 was Canada; 2011, the UK; 2013, Brazil; 2015, Germany and in 2017 it will be Abu Dhabi. In the promotional literature for the Abu Dhabi Apprentice competition they mention Doug, although it is some 63 years since he competed. When the Coalition Government came into power they dropped UK Skills and called it the National Apprenticeship Service. They sent Doug a plastic card from the NAS stating he was No. 1 apprentice. If you go onto World Skills web page you can get further info.



We took the opportunity to photograph Doug with Sir William. Doug is wearing the official blazer from his 1953 visit which still fits although Doug does admit it's a little more difficult to button-up these days!

Photo: Peter Robins

PASSING TORNADO

With West Coast suspended once more, steam will be in short supply on the main line for the coming months so those few trains that run under the auspices of DB Schenker will attract even more attention.

One such was UK Railtours' *The Red Rose* from London Paddington to Worcester Shrub Hill on 14th February behind 60163 *Tornado* seen hurrying past Shottesbrooke in an effort to recover from a 37 minute late start. Arrival at Worcester was just 3 down.

Photo: Mike Walker



SMOOTHER 'DONKEY'

During several Sundays in January and February Network Rail have been relaying the line between Furze Platt and Cookham with continuously welded rail considerably improving the ride and eliminating one of the few remaining sections of jointed track on the branch.

RON BROOKS

To long-standing members the name Ron Brooks will be familiar. Sadly, we have to record he passed away in early January.

He joined the society in its first year, 1977, and was an enthusiastic member until moving to Gloucestershire many years ago – his new house quite literally backing onto Winchcombe station on the Gloucestershire Warwickshire Railway. He contributed a regular book review column in the *Marlow Donkey*. He was also an enthusiastic supporter and volunteer at Fawley where he helped install and commission the signalling system.

GWR HST AT MARYLEBONE



GWR 43094 in the unusual surroundings of London Marylebone waiting to leave with 1Z43, the 15:33 to Swansea, diverted due to engineering works on the GWML on 28th December 2015.

Photo: Mike Walker

YEOMAN SERVICE

Thirty years of the Class 59s

Mike Walker



How time flies. It seems only yesterday that we gathered in the snow at Woodborough to get our first glimpse of something new and alien called a Class 59, yet it was actually the 9th February 1986 - thirty years ago.

Foster Yeoman had started his quarrying business near Wells in 1923 and from the start much of the output had been by rail in 10 ton 5 plank wagons to individual customers until 1949 when they changed to road haulage. With the expansion of the vast Torr Works at Merehead a return was made to rail transport in 1969 with block trains working to newly established distribution depots around the country. Initially these were hauled by Class 52 Westerns and later by Class 47s and then Class 56s.

By the early 1980s the company had become one of BR's biggest freight customers and it sought to reduce its costs by increasing the length and load capacity of its trains. The problem was that, despite being 3250hp, the Class 56s were not up to the job without double-heading which meant the desired cost savings could not be realised and it didn't help that the locos didn't have that good a reliability record.

After some tough negotiation BR made the unprecedented suggestion to Foster Yeoman that they provide their own locomotives which BR would crew. In some ways this was a logical extension of the existing practice whereby Foster Yeoman provided its own wagons, albeit leased, but to extend it to locomotives was a radical departure in the days of the still-nationalised BR.

So the company went shopping. It soon became apparent that the only realistic UK supplier, Brush, weren't interested in an order for six locomotives so they turned to the USA. Back in 1980 they had purchased a US-specification SW1001 'switcher' from GM's Electro-Motive Division (EMD) which had given excellent service, not missing a single shift in five years so it was to be expected that EMD would be approached.

For their part, EMD were enthusiastic to get involved. Looking carefully at Foster Yeoman's requirements they suggested they only needed four not six locomotives thereby saving the customer quite a sum and by using its standard components

wherever possible costs could be kept reasonable. An order was placed towards the end of 1984 for four units for delivery in late 1985.

The result was a custom-designed unit which EMD designated as model JT26CW-SS which was shared with some very different locomotives supplied to Australia around the same time. They were based on the highly successful US SD40-2 of which 3957 were built between 1972-1986. The same 3300hp 16-645E3B engine, AR10 main Alternator and D77 motors were used along with the standard US HT-C trucks (bogies). The control system was based on that used in the later SD50 model and included EMD's ground-breaking 'Super Series' controlled wheel-slip system that provided greatly enhanced tractive effort. This was the first application of this technology for export.

The four original Class 59s lined up in correct order with 59001 on the left outside the Merehead loco depot [Above] during an open day on 25th June 1989.

Photo: Dave Theobald

The locomotive that first introduced Foster Yeoman to EMD, SW1001 'switcher' 44 Western Yeoman II rests in the yard [Below] on 22nd September 1992.

Photo: Mike Walker





Before the 59s, double-headed 56s were the norm. On 16th September 1983, 56 031 Merehead leads sister unit 56 032 on a 43-wagon Foster Yeoman stone train past Ruscombe after naming to mark the 30 millionth ton of stone to be moved out of Yeoman's Merehead quarry by rail since 1969.

Photo: Mike Walker



Conrail 6355 is a representative of the 4000 SD40-2s built by EMD which share their engines and electrical equipment with the Class 59. They are rated at 3000hp but there is a difference in the way this is calculated in the US compared to Europe so by the European method it's 3300hp, the same as the Class 59.

Photo: Mike Walker

The body was of course, designed specially to suit the UK loading gauge. Indeed, the roof of a Class 59 is barely higher than the nose of a typical US loco and despite their great length, 70' 0½", EMD's engineers were unable to fit dynamic brakes as had been originally intended. (Dynamic brakes change the motors into generators converting the train's kinetic energy to electricity which is then turned to heat in fan-cooled resistor banks and dissipated to atmosphere.) Assembly was largely done in EMD's development shop by a hand-picked team rather than on the main shop floor.

The four were completed at the end of 1985 (EMD order no. 848002) and shipped to the UK arriving at Southampton on 23rd January 1986 and were dragged to Derby for inspection, weighing and commissioning.

The first live, loaded tests were scheduled for Sunday 9th February with 59002 taking a 3000 ton train from Woodborough to Theale. The train arrived at the former accompanied by 56055 and 56031 *Merehead*, which was just as well as 59002 was declared a failure before departure! Later, I got to know Jack Wheelihan, Field Service Director of EMD, who, over dinner one night admitted it was not their "finest hour". It seems the problem was simple, an incorrectly wired, relay - so much for hand-picked staff! A second attempt the following Sunday with both 59001 and 59002 (and not a Grid to be seen) was a triumph.

The new locomotives could claim several "firsts": the first privately-owned diesels to run on BR, the first foreign-built diesels on BR and, as mentioned, the first export application of EMD 'Super Series' wheel-creep control system. This uses a



59002 at Woodborough surrounded by BR, Foster Yeoman and EMD staff shortly before being declared a failure on 9th February 1986.

Photo: Mike Walker

Doppler radar to accurately track ground speed and the control system ensures the wheels turn slightly faster and therefore slightly slipping. It had been found that this produces much enhanced tractive effort outputs both starting and continuous and in the case of the Class 59 this equated to 113,550lbs starting and 65,300lbs at 14.3 mph continuous compared to 61,800lbs and 53,950lbs at 16.8 mph respectively for the similarly powered Class 56, both being geared for a top speed of 60 mph.

Once crews had been trained the class became a familiar sight on the Western Region with occasional forays further afield. In accordance with the agreement with BR, the drivers were BR men and maintenance was carried out by BR staff from Bristol Bath Road in a purpose-built facility at Merehead. In the initial period, EMD had their own staff on hand and riding the locos in service to advise on any issues and liaise with La Grange. This was normal EMD practice in all new locomotive deliveries both in the home and export markets.

Once in service the newcomers soon proved themselves capable of all that had been expected and more. They set new levels of availability, 95%, not seen in the UK before but an unexpected problem soon emerged. They had US-style headlights and the drivers delighted in bowling along at night with them on "main beam". Complaints soon came in from other drivers who complained of being blinded. Within weeks, all four had the headlights permanently wired in the dipped position!

During the summer of 1986, all four received names: *Yeoman Endeavour*, *Enterprise*, *Highlander* and *Challenger* respectively whilst 59001 was fitted with a ceremonial US-style brass bell above the windscreen at the No.1 end.

Just as EMD had predicted, the four proved adequate for the diagrams planned but soon, with the economy booming the demand for stone in construction rose steeply and, combined with a desire to take over some trains that still had BR power, it was decided to order a fifth, 59005 (order no. 878039) which was delivered in June 1989 and named *Kenneth J Painter* at an open day at Merehead on the 25th of that month.

The boom was to be short-lived and the downturn caused by the recession during the nineties saw the fleet under-utilised so in May 1997, 59003 was sent to work for a Yeoman subsidiary in Germany and in 2001 it was sold to open-access operator Heavy Haul Power International. They in turn eventually sold it to GB Railfreight in November 2014 who reimported it and following overhaul at Eastleigh, it now works heavy bio-mass trains out of Liverpool Bulk Terminal, still carrying its *Yeoman Highlander* nameplates and cast numberplates.



The third of the ARC batch, 59103, awaits the unveiling of its name Village of Mells, at the Old Oak Depot open day on 18th August 1991.

Photo: Mike Walker

Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery...

Once the Foster Yeoman locos had got into their stride it soon became apparent to Associated Roadstone (who operate a similar rail-served quarry at Whatley on the other side of the hill to Merehead) that they would need similar locomotives if they were to be able to match their rival's costs. Therefore they approached EMD and the result was the four Class 59/1s delivered in October 1990 (order no. 878029). Unlike the original five, these were built at GM's Canadian plant in London, Ontario as by this time loco construction was being wound down at La Grange which was now too big to be economic with the reduced level of business.

Apart from their distinctive mustard and grey livery in place of the Yeoman silver and blue, the ARC locos were to the same specification with the exception of the head/tail lamps which were now BR standard units - no more blinding on-comers! The four were all named after villages around the ARC quarry, Whatley, Chantry, Mells and Great Elm respectively and, like the FY examples, cast numberplates were carried.

Initially the two operations were kept completely separate although BR crewed both and the ARC locos would visit Merehead for maintenance. Despite being fierce rivals for market share, the two companies realised considerable savings could be made by pooling their rail operations. Thus Mendip Rail was born in 1993. The new organisation doesn't actually own anything it simply manages the combined fleet so it has become commonplace to see Yeoman locos hauling ARC hoppers and vice-versa or even a mixture. For a short period in the late 1990s 59002 carried a silver, green and orange livery with MRL branding which was also applied to many hoppers which continue to carry it.

The quarrying business is not immune from the corporate world of takeovers which have encompassed both the Somerset giants. ARC disappeared first being swallowed up by Hanson which led the 59/1s to swapping their distinctive livery for a blue and light grey Hanson scheme which looked much like the revised Yeoman livery which had been applied to the 59/0s. Yeoman itself lasted longer as a family-owned business but eventually sold out to the Holcim Group in 2006 and is now part of Aggregate Industries which led to the current blue, silver and turquoise livery. Amid all this change of ownership, the Mendip Rail alliance continues.

Meanwhile, Up North...

General Motors found another customer for the JT26CW-SS in 1991 when National Power signed up for a single example (order no. 918273) which was delivered from London in February



59203 Vale of Pickering, one of the National Power "production" batch leads a Drax-bound train past Kellingley Colliery in August 1997.

Photo: Dave Theobald

1993 as 59201 *Vale of York*, identical to the ARC locos and painted in a blue, red and white livery - not unlike Network SouthEast! This was initially used to haul trains of limestone from the Peak Forest area to the power plants in South Yorkshire where it was used to "scrub" sulphur dioxide from the exhaust gases. However, it was joined in August 1995 by five more, 59202-6 (order no. 948510) which were the final examples of the type built. The first four became *Vale of White Horse*, *Pickering*, *Glamorgan* and *Evesham* respectively. 59206 was to have been *Vale of Belvoir* but ran nameless until becoming the *Pride of Ferrybridge* in June 1997.

In addition to the limestone trains, they worked coal trains from the mines and ports to the power stations in South Yorkshire and a depot was established at Ferrybridge. As with the Somerset operations, BR provided the drivers and maintenance staff.

Following the privatisation of the rail industry this work was taken over by EWS and in April 1998 National Power decided to concentrate on power generation and sold its rail operation to EWS. The new owner lost no time in repainting the 59/2s in its maroon and gold livery (albeit without the 'lightning stripe' on the 66's) and used the six more widely. Today, all are nominally allocated to support the Mendip Rail operation and carry DB Schenker red livery whilst 59202, 5 and 6 were renamed *Alan Meadows Taylor MD Mendip Rail*, *L Keith McNair* and *John F Yeoman Rail Pioneer* respectively reflecting their new operations - the others have lost their *Vale* names.

Today, with 59003 back home, the full 14-loco fleet is in operation in this country for the first time and thirty years after the arrival of the first, all are still performing the duties they were intended for reliably and without fuss. Well cared for at Merehead and EMD's base at Longport, it seems they more than likely have another three decades of work ahead of them.



59206 and 59004 combine to head a string of empties from Hither Green back to Whatley on 30th August 2013.

Photo: Mike Walker

The Marlow Donkey

A WEST COUNTRY WEEKEND

by Tim Speechley

Sometime last summer I was at a bus event with my pal Martin and he told me he rather fancied a visit to the West of England Transport Collection (WETC) at Winkleigh in Devon, so I said "OK let's do it" and we put the date of their only open day of the year, 4 October, in our diaries. Later I checked he was still serious and started to plan the trip. Fortuitously that weekend was also the date for the West Somerset Railway's Autumn Gala so I thought we could do that on the Saturday, stay somewhere in the area and then go to Winkleigh for the Sunday. A quick look at the internet found a well recommended B&B near Tiverton, which I booked having first ascertained that John and Sue Tuck's establishment at Lynton was already full.



7812 Erlestoke Manor awaits departure from Minehead with the 12.45.

So come the morning of Saturday 3rd October we were on our way down the M4 and M5 in glorious sunshine to Bishops Lydeard in time to catch the 10.45 departure. I had been in touch with Tim Edmonds in advance, in the hope we could get together, and very kindly he had sent me two runabout passes for the WSR that he gets periodically as a volunteer. What a good friend!

The gala was very much a Western event, with six different ex-GWR locos in use plus, rather incongruously, 60163 *Tornado*. Our first train had 7828 *Odney Manor* and we took that all the way to Minehead. En-route I had managed to utilise my new mobile device to contact Tim and arranged to meet him and Veronica at Washford at 13.15. It transpired that Mike Walker had also decided to come down for the event, so I told him of our rendezvous and we all met up together for a light lunch at the Washford Inn. Our 12.45 train from Minehead was hauled by 7812 *Erlestoke Manor* and unbelievably it was the first time I had seen the loco in steam since preservation, despite it being a "favourite loco" of mine. This all dates back to the 1950's, when as a very small boy, we had a holiday staying on the cliffs above the line at Teignmouth. I would go down to the beach with my parents and every day we would see 7812 and so *Erlestoke* became special. Why I had never seen it working after its rescue from Barry I just don't know.

60163 *Tornado*, too long for the Minehead turntable, heads the 16.45 from there past Castle Hill, Williton, with the author in the third bay of the front coach.

Photo: Mike Walker

After lunch four of us caught the 14.14 to Williton with 7828 again and there Tim and Veronica went back to Minehead and home behind *Tornado*. Martin and I had a good look round the workshops and at the various diesel locos before catching the 15.34 back to Minehead behind 4936 *Kinlet Hall*, which had just crossed 2-8-0 2857 on its way to Bishops Lydeard. We had a whole 25 minutes before departing again but it gave us time to have a quick look at 0-4-0ST *Kilmersdon* in Somerset and Dorset Joint Railway Prussian blue livery that was working brake van trips in the station area. The reason for going back to Minehead was so we could have a full length trip behind *Tornado* but what only dawned on me at the last moment was that it



4936 *Kinlet Hall* alongside the turntable at Minehead station.

All photos by Tim Speechley unless noted.

would be tender first. All the other locos were being turned on the turntable at Minehead but the A1 was just too long to fit. I sent a text to Mike, photographing at the lineside, warning him of this, so he could get a broadside shot, which he did at Castle Hill in beautiful sunlight.

Journey times are quite long on the WSR, so we were not back at Bishops Lydeard until 18.15 and we had to get a move on to try to find our digs for the night whilst there was still some daylight and we only just managed this after some exciting driving on the country roads. Dinner was taken at the "Trout Inn" at Bickleigh, which Martin told me used to be a favourite stopping point for Devon General excursions back in the days when they operated such things.



After a good night's sleep we awoke not to the gorgeous sun of yesterday but instead a heavy mist. Our initial disappointment was only temporarily assuaged by an excellent full English breakfast but once on the road again it was apparent that today was unlikely to be anything but dull weather-wise. Travelling more or less due west for about 20 miles we crossed the Exeter to Barnstaple railway line at Eggesford station and then before long we were at Winkleigh. The transport collection is located at an old airfield and on arrival it was obvious from the number of cars that this once a year event is very popular.

We caught a shuttle bus (I can't remember exactly what it was but it was definitely an open topper) the short distance to the entrance point, where a number of vehicles being used for the car park shuttle and for longer road trips were being turned or awaited loading. Once we had found somebody to pay (it didn't seem to be the best organised event) we followed the main access road that was lined with visiting vehicles, both psvs and private cars plus some commercials. It was striking how many "old" vehicles there were, by which I mean pre or just post-war but elsewhere there were gaggles of say Bristol VR's or Mercedes Benz midi-buses, which may be speculative buys by the Collection or being stored for others. Further along this main access road we began to encounter some rather longer term vehicle residents, some of which were obviously returning to nature and beyond saving, including what we suspect had been a Leyland Cub from the 30's. As well as psv types there were also several rusting cars, mostly Morris 1000's, all of which

looked beyond the point of no return. It was very sad to see so much preservation potential being left to rot but I suspect if they had not been here they would have been scrapped long ago.

Eventually we reached the old hangars from the airfield's wartime days and in which the core of the collection is housed along with private individuals' vehicles being worked on. Before venturing inside we observed several buses closely parked together and obviously in positions where they had remained for years. In many cases they were so close it was impossible to identify what they were. Within the undergrowth there were piles of components, wheels, engines, gearboxes etc. Finally we entered the undercover area and the whole perimeter had buses and coaches in various stages of restoration, or not, many of which were again very "old". Being in Devon it was of no surprise that many of the vehicles here and outside were from local operators, such as Exeter Corporation, Southern and Western National, Devon General, Royal Blue and Plymouth Corporation. However, there seemed to be a disproportionate number of ex-Bournemouth vehicles, both motor and trolley buses and this is because some years ago this collection was evicted from its former long-term storage facility in Dorset and thanks to the generosity of Colin Shears had been able to relocate to Winkleigh, though it is sad to see several fine restored and part-restored vehicles out in the open. This all goes to show that bus preservation isn't just about buying the vehicle. Where to keep it is just as important and when that storage facility ceases to be available you have a major problem.



EFJ666 on which we had our ride (see text for details) and TFJ808, a 1956 Guy Arab IV with rather nice Massey body. Both ex-City of Exeter.



EK8867, ex-Wigan 1932 Leyland Tiger TS4/Santus and JA7591, ex-Stockport 1937 Tiger TS7/English Electric.



Pristine visiting MG alongside a mouldering Leyland National-based Bendy-bus that worked originally for South Yorkshire PTE (FWA450V).



What is believed to be a 1930's Leyland Cub returns to nature.



Sad to see these Bournemouth trolleys in open store.

OD5868, Devon General 1935 Leyland Lion / Weymann B31F and LTV702 a 1951 AEC Regal III/ East Lancs B35R from City of Nottingham await restoration. It could be a long wait !

Having looked at most of the vehicles we went for a short ride in Exeter 66 (EFJ 666), a 1938 Leyland Tiger TS8 with Cravens 32 seat rear entrance single deck body. We ended up at the local cider maker's premises but remained abstemious, though that may not have been the case had it been a brewery.

Winkleigh and had it not found a temporary home there, may well have ended up as scrap.

Back at the airfield we had a further look round and I would have liked to have got some photos of vehicles out on the road but it was really very dull indeed, so we decided to leave mid-afternoon. Heading for the shuttle bus, I spotted Fraser Clayton, Chairman of the Historic Commercial Vehicle Society, and couldn't resist having a word with him. I said it was my first visit and had found it sad to see so much rotting equipment but he said that the important thing about Winkleigh was that Colin Shears (who founded the WETC and had died last year, passing responsibility on to his son Daniel) had saved countless vehicles from the scrapyards, many of which had then been passed on to other people for restoration elsewhere. Fraser told me his own immaculately restored 1937 Leyland Cheetah with Harrington dorsal fin coach bodywork (EYA 923) had been obtained from

We got onto an ex-Wilts and Dorset Bristol VR (BFX 666T) for the short trip back to the car park and the driver recognised Martin as he had worked for him way back when, possibly when he was at Torquay. I was very glad we had made the effort to go but it's an odd event. There are plenty of enthusiasts but also a lot of local people there too, which makes photography rather difficult, if you know what I mean. Perhaps there aren't that many things to do in this rural part of Devon. Nevertheless, despite all the sad and neglected vehicles there, we saw an awful lot of very interesting, unusual and in many cases, very old vehicles, the majority of which have a west-country background. The photos within the article show a tiny selection of what was there and I can thoroughly recommend a visit should you be in that part of Devon on the first Sunday of October.



UO2331 1927 Austin with 1934 Tiverton B13F body, alongside OD5489, a 1933 Vauxhall Cadet with 1946 body by Mount Pleasant.



Plymouth 141, a 1938 Leyland Titan with later 1953 Leyland body next to Devon General AEC Regent V, VDV817 with Metro Cammell bodywork.



DOD474, a Devon General 1940 AEC Regal with Weymann body.

Contrasting Devonian front ends. Taw and Torridge Bedford OB/Duple Vista BJV590 stands next to 1983 Carlyle bodied Ford Transit, A927MDV, one of the first Devon General vehicles that heralded the brief minibus revolution in urban transport.





A last ride along the Great Central with Mike Page

There was little time left in June 1966 to sample a trip along the former Great Central Railway main line between Nottingham and London Marylebone. One of the outings organised by the Oxford University Railway Society (OURS) was to ride the GCR: it was a busy day out and included visits to Saltley, Derby and Colwick motive power depots.

Half-a-dozen OURS members took an early morning diesel multiple unit (DMU) from Oxford to Banbury on June 16, 1966. Steam had not yet finished through Oxford as Banbury steam shed was still operational (closed in October 1966) so mostly Stanier 'Black Five' 4-6-0s and 8F 2-8-0s took freight through to Didcot, Basingstoke and Eastleigh. The occasional Standard 5 4-6-0s and 9F 2-10-0s appeared too though none were seen that damp morning. Brush/Sulzer 'Type 4s' (47s) D1708, 1714 and 1910 were around in Oxford shed's yards and we noted D1687 on 1X82 going south near Aynho Junction.

We slowed past Banbury shed where 'Black Fives' 44803, 44811, 44914 and 44803 stood in the shed yard in steam along with 8F 48700 and 9F 92138. As we waited on Banbury Station for our connection to Birmingham (Snow Hill) 'Black Five' 45089 went south light engine, presumably to the shed, followed shortly by 'Castle' 7029 *Clun Castle*. 'Clun' was based at Tyseley, Birmingham, and was still regularly scheduled to work

Stanier 'Black Five' 44941 calls at Woodford Halse with the 14.38 London (Marylebone) – Nottingham (Victoria) train on May 13 1966. The station is now an 'unstaffed halt'. Its sidings and the branch to Banbury are rusted over. Even the signals have been stripped of their semaphores as the GCR main line seems to wither away.

All photos by the author.

the 06.25 Bordesley-Banbury fitted freight and a return working. Then Derby's 8F 48635 bustled through with a freight for the Southern Region, probably to the continuing chagrin of the 'steam-free' Western Region management! A 'Brush/Sulzer Type 4' (47) with a train from Paddington took us onwards. At Leamington, an 'English Electric Type 4' (40) coupled with a 'BR/Sulzer Type 2' (24) were seen apparently on crew-training trips foreshadowing the coming end of steam on the Birmingham – Oxford routes. Nothing else of real note was seen until we passed Bordesley Yards just south of Birmingham where 9F 92073 was waiting on a southbound train of empty iron ore wagons. She was, at a guess, running from Stewarts & Lloyds steelworks in Bilston back to the Wroxtton ironstone quarries just north of Banbury. And so we entered Snow Hill Station where we picked up taxis to reach Saltley.

Well, Saltley's three roundhouses had plenty of roads free. On shed were just 26 steam locos and seven diesels. They included two 'Black Fives', seven Ivatt Class 2 2-6-0s, six Stanier 8Fs,



Shrewsbury's Stanier 'Black Five' 44777 is undergoing retubing at Saltley. Repairs to the roundhouse appear to have halted leaving the fitters to work in the open!



In the Saltley shed yard, Standard Class 4 76048 and BR/Sulzer Type 2 (Class 25) wait their next jobs. The new diesel depot is to the left of the coaling tower.

Visiting Saltley motive power depot on June 16 1966 found Speke Junction's 92155 (left) and a fitter working on Saltley's 92151 in the 'rebuilt' round-house. Birkenhead's 92164 is hiding behind 92151.



two Caprotti 'Standard Five' 4-6-0s, two 'Standard 4' 2-6-0s, five 9Fs, one ex-GWR 57XX 0-6-0 pannier tank 4646 from Tyseley undergoing a boiler washout, one '08', four Derby/Sulzer 2s (25s) and two Derby/Sulzer 'Peaks' (45s). The 'Caprottis' 73131 and 73140 were visitors from Patricroft (9H). Among the 8Fs was Speke's (8C) 48412 and the 'Black Fives', Warrington's (Dallam 8B) 45322. The 9Fs included 8C's 92155. Few of these 26 'steamers' survived into 1967 and the shed closed to steam on March 6 that year. Compare the 1966 scene at Saltley with the 114 engines I noted there 'on shed' on Saturday June 24 1956!

Taxis took us back to Birmingham New Street for a quick ride with a 'Peak' (45) to Derby. I suppose for us 'steam-minded' observers the surprise was to see a Burton (16F) 'Jinty' 0-6-0T, the 47643, shunting the yards serving the breweries on the north side of the station. 47643 had only a couple of months more before being withdrawn. Steam was to finish at 16F in September, so it was unusual to see a 'Jinty' being used so late in the day! On the way, we met a fair flow of freight in the hands of 47s, 25s, 8Fs and, surprisingly, Newton Heath's (9D) dirty green 'Ivatt 2' 46505! This engine had spent most of her years serving Welsh secondary lines from Oswestry (89A).

At Derby we left the train and crossed the footbridge into the works area, but our 'permit' was only for the shed. Derby's two 'roundhouses' (two turntables and stalls inside a large rectangular building) had, like Saltley, plenty of 'stalls' free and were occupied by diesel shunters and one 'Black Five', Colwick's 45224. The diesels awaited works attention perhaps. Only ten steam locos were present in the yard, with five of them grouped around the yard turntable. They included seven Stanier 8Fs, one Stanier 'Black Five' and one each of a 'Standard Four' 4-6-0 and a 9F. The latter, Birkenhead's 9F (8H) 92163, looked ex-works. 'Standard 4' 75050 was from Bank Hall (8K). 45441 hailed from 8C while the other 8Fs and 'Black Five' were locally based at Colwick and Kirkby-in-Ashfield. In the works yard stood a forlorn line of the 'pioneer' diesels, namely: 10000, 10201/2 & 3. I believe that 10001 was at Willesden at the time. Derby shed closed in March 1967.

Time to move on! Our journey to Nottingham Midland in a Lincoln-bound DMU went via Trent Junction. We passed 'Standard 4' 2-6-0 76044 (16A Nottingham) and 44936 (16B Colwick, formerly 38A and 40E). Taxis took us to Colwick shed, and after a short word on safety, the shed foreman let us loose.



A 'grab shot' taken from the train shows Burton-on-Trent's 'Jinty' 47643 still hard at work in the yards to the north of the station with the 'Double Diamond' brewery on the right.



A sad line of the 'pioneer' diesel electrics stood alongside the roundhouses building (on the left) at Derby. In the shot are (I think) 10203 (leading), 10202, 10000 and 10201.



How the motive power scene had changed at Colwick on June 16 1966. Mostly Stanier 8Fs and 'Black Fives', one 9F and a few Standard Class 4 2-6-0s and a couple of diesels were on view.

I never saw Colwick in Eastern Region days when at its 'peak' in 1948 it had allocated 211 locos. They ranged from eight GNR D3 4-4-0s and nine GNR D2 4-4-0s through to 20 04 2-8-0s, 24 J39 0-6-0s, 16 J6 0-6-0s, 21 of the older GNR Ivatt J1 and J5 0-6-0s and 39 WD 2-8-0s. Mixed traffic and passenger work was handled by 11 B1 and nine B17 4-6-0s as well as 15 K2 and 10 K3 2-6-0s.

The shed, now 16B, was now firmly in London Midland Region hands. One had to use one's imagination to think of it thickly populated with its 1948 allocation! Now 45 engines, nearly all in steam, faced us. They included 27 Stanier 8F 2-8-0s, seven Stanier 'Black Fives', three 'Standard 4' 2-6-0s, one 9F 2-10-0, 'Dept. 29' (I have forgotten what type of engine No.29 was!) and two, very forlorn-looking and very dead, B1 4-6-0s. The B1s were 61089 and 61302, which were both Colwick engines and looked very cold on this damp, drizzly day. Colwick closed to steam on December 31, 1966.

We took a Grantham-Nottingham DMU from Colwick & Netherpton to the Victoria Station, after watching 8F 48432 (16G Westhouses) heading around the north facing junction with a freight. Our plan was to join the 17.15 to Marylebone, which I was taking as far as Aylesbury.

Looking down on the yards from our DMU near London Road, they seemed somewhat emptier and quieter compared with my first sighting of them in 1956 when riding behind a J6 on a Derby (Friargate) – Grantham local. Then there were three steam locos were in action on shunting duties. Very soon we joined the Marylebone line and headed into the south tunnel before emerging into the gloomy, though spacious Victoria Station. Our train was already in the platform. While we took photos two freights passed through simultaneously headed by Stanier 8Fs. Colwick's 48313 was going south, tender-first, with a loaded coal train while 48282 (Kirkby-in-Ashfield) approached from the south tunnel going north with empty mineral wagons. Our engine was Colwick's 'Black Five' 44936, which was once based at Carlisle Upperby.

We left on time with only four BR Mark 1s so acceleration was very brisk from all the stops down to Aylesbury. I suppose with the 'Beeching Axe' in full swing it was surprising that this passenger service had survived at all. The scene was rural, with mostly gently rolling hills and farmland, all the way from Loughborough (Central) down to Aylesbury. Even the stretch between Nottingham and Leicester (Central) was pastoral! We met only one northbound train: Colwick's 44825 on the 14.35



Laid aside at Colwick were the shed's last two B1s, 61089 and 61302, seen here in company with Stanier 8F 48393 and 'Black Five' 44944.



Stanier 'Black Five' 44936 awaits departure from Nottingham Victoria with the 17.15 to London Marylebone on June 16 1966 complete with OURS headboard!



Our 44936 takes water at Brackley. Signal semaphore arms had been removed here too. Note the gas lamp.

Marylebone – Nottingham. We saw no other trains. Already the London Midland Region had transferred most (if not all) remaining GCR main line freight workings onto other routes. Certainly the branch to Banbury at Woodford Halse looked rusted over and the engine shed was empty and cold. I would imagine that those two freights we saw at Nottingham Victoria would be working along the Colwick/Grantham routes and certainly not the GCR. Indeed most of the signal arms at the intermediate stations had been removed, except at Rugby Central, so the GCR route was almost like a long, double-tracked siding down to Aylesbury.

Well, it all seemed very sad. Ten years ago we would have seen 01 after 01 on freight, A3s, V2s, B1s and a few L1s on passenger services and odd jobs being performed by J11s and J39s. I remember on a ‘train-spotting’ trip to Rugby in 1956 spending some five hours by the ‘Birdcage’ bridge and noting 27 01s (not counting those seen twice). I suppose some would have argued that the Marylebone-Sheffield-Manchester expresses were lightly used. I was surprised in 1956 to see Neasden and Leicester (G.C.) A3s racing across the ‘Birdcage’ bridge at Rugby with only six or seven coaches while Midland Region 7P 4-6-0s and 8P Pacifics were passing by below with 14-18 coaches on their tails! The only long passenger trains on the GCR appeared to be the inter-regional ‘cross-country’ services such as York-Bournemouth. The freight trains were a different matter altogether. If the GCR main lines had been there today, I wonder how many of the existing freight services would have been transferred to that route? With its European clearances we might have seen European wagons on their way to Lancashire and Yorkshire! I suppose we shall never know.

So eventually we reached Aylesbury, where I left the others to carry on to Marylebone. Aylesbury was busy with local DMUs, one of which I caught to Princes Risborough to connect with another DMU to go via Banbury to visit relatives in Leamington Spa. That was it: the GCR main line, Nottingham - Aylesbury, closed at the end of 1966.



Conditions had become very murky when we arrived at Aylesbury. DMU services went to Marylebone and Princes Risborough, 44936 is ready to go with the 17.15 Nottingham Victoria – London Marylebone on June 16 1966.



44936 sets out from Aylesbury on the last leg of its journey with the 17.15 Nottingham Victoria – London Marylebone on June 16 1966 leaving Mike to catch a connecting DMU to Princes Risborough.

LIVING WITH THE WEST SOMERSET RAILWAY

TIM EDMONDS



When Veronica and I decided on a retirement move to Minehead, the presence of the West Somerset Railway was a major plus factor, giving opportunities for getting involved as volunteers as well as enjoying a major heritage railway on the doorstep. We moved in 2013 and now have experienced over two years of living with the West Somerset Railway. This is how it has been working out...

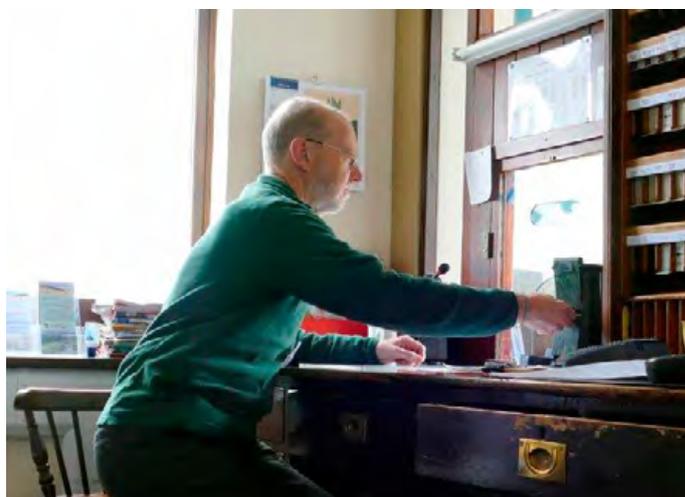
The local scene

One of the first things we noticed on arrival was that as well as being a major tourist attraction, very important to the economy of West Somerset, the railway is an integral part of the local scene. The sound of a whistle and a moving steam train can be heard from most parts of Minehead for much of the year. Shoppers at the Morrison and Tesco supermarkets can see the trains coming and going. Motorists may be stopped at the Seaward Way level crossing to allow steam trains to pass and the station is right at the centre of things on the sea front. Soon after our move we called in an electrician to do some work on our house and I noticed he was wearing a railway badge. It turned out he was Vice Chairman of the Diesel & Electric Preservation Group, based at Williton, and drives diesel-hydraulics on the WSR. He is also the WSR's electrician. We quickly met other people who were involved with the railway as volunteers.

There is a WSR Resident's Discount Card available and many use it – among other things it is a convenient way to enjoy a pub lunch at places like Washford and Watchet without having to worry about driving home afterwards. Although there is undoubtedly a local demand for the *Quantock Belle* dining train, few from Minehead use it because it starts from Bishops Lydeard. However, the Thomas the Tank Engine days are Minehead-based and attract many local families. Also popular are the Santa Specials, which are worked from both ends of the line to 'grottoes' at Crowcombe Heathfield and Blue Anchor. The Christmas Carol Trains are usually a sell-out and they too are worked from both ends of the line to Williton, where it is possible to hear competing brass bands on opposite platforms!

The weather was wet and horrible on the morning of 14th February 2015, the first day of the new operating season. However, by the afternoon all was transformed with clear skies and bright sunshine. Living locally meant it was possible to react to this and, with the knowledge that 7828 Odney Manor would be boiler-first on the 12:35 from Bishops Lydeard, this shot from the Ker Moor foot crossing at Blue Anchor was the result.

An issue which is regularly aired in the local paper concerns running timetabled trains over the link into Taunton station. People see excursions arriving off the main line and cannot understand why regular trains don't do so. The Chamber of Commerce thinks the WSR should run a 'commuter service' but has so far failed to say who should fund it, given the need for



Tim in action as a Booking Office clerk at Minehead, although on this occasion it was not the usual Monday but an early-season Saturday, 28th February 2015, covering for absence of the usual volunteer. Note the racks of Edmondson tickets and the date stamp.

round-the-year operation by permanent staff! More realistic would be a service into Bishops Lydeard to connect with the WSR and there are ongoing discussions with Somerset County Council, West Somerset and Taunton Deane District Councils, Network Rail and GWR. Don't hold your breath, though!

Volunteering

It was my intention to get involved as a volunteer on the WSR, but I had little idea of what role I could fulfil or what commitment I could give. Each year the railway runs a 'Volunteer Open Day' at Bishops Lydeard, which includes talks by volunteers and a return train ride to Williton for a signal box and station visit. Both of us attended in May 2014 and a few weeks later we went on the volunteer induction course. Veronica chose to work at Dunster, where she carries out a variety of station duties for half a day a week in the season. I expressed an interest in something based at Minehead, so that it would be within walking distance of home. A chat with the persuasive Minehead Station Master, Pam Hawkins, revealed that they had no regular Booking Office Clerk on Mondays – would I like to take that on? I had never thought of myself in this role, but after spending a morning observing two of the regulars I decided to give it a go. With a few weeks of training 'on the job' under supervision, I was let loose on the general public in July 2014.

Mondays are generally one of the less busy days but I'm there on my own, whereas usually there will be two on duty. There are Monday trains every week from mid-May to the end of September, plus around the Easter and May Day holidays and the Autumn half-term. It's turned out to be enjoyable and rewarding, although at the busiest times it requires quick wits and a steady nerve. For most of the popular journeys the WSR uses Edmondson tickets (printed at Dunster station) date-stamped in the traditional way. For some journeys and various discounts there is a 'Tikkitek' machine to print paper tickets and, if all else fails, there are tear-off emergency ticket forms. Payment is by cash or card. One of my more challenging moments was when the comms network for the card machine went down 20 minutes before the first train of the day, with a queue building up outside. Fortunately I knew who to call and was able to continue dealing with cash payments whilst the leads were checked and the router rebooted. All was restored with ten minutes to spare. The fare structure includes family and concession tickets and there is a ring-binder of fares notices to get your head round including: 'Buy one rover get one half price'; money-off vouchers for rovers; Tesco vouchers; warrants for shareholders and WSRA members; Gold and Silver cards and no fewer than four levels of discount for various reasons. Yes, mistakes are easy to make!



Minehead station is sometimes 'off-limits' to the general public when trains are not running, usually if maintenance work is in progress. However, a staff ID card works wonders and on 2nd February 2015 enabled me to get this shot of work under way on SDJR 2-8-0 88, withdrawn for overhaul at the end of 2014.



Knowledge of special workings on the line from the Ops notices meant I was at Alcombe Crossing after the last service trains of the day on 26th August 2014 to record class 03 D2133 with this weed killing train.



The social side of volunteering: Dunster station volunteers leave their barbecue in the yard on 26th July 2014 to watch 4160 pass with an evening working of The Quantock Belle dining train from Bishops Lydeard.

One of the duties is to signal to platform staff a few minutes before train departure times to show that ticket sales are complete or, if there are still people waiting, to hold the train for them. Latecomers can pay cash on the train, but the few occasions when I've held trains have been typically when I am dealing with a group that doesn't have a straightforward ticket requirement: "...there are seven of us, three adults, three children and an OAP, oh and a dog, oh and we've got three buy-one-get-one-half-price coupons. Can we pay with Tesco vouchers? How long do we need to park for? Have you got any change?" People usually appreciate it if you make the effort and provided that the train is not delayed for more than five minutes there will be minimal operational consequences.

Much of the work at Minehead is answering questions and selling the railway to the public. Whereas at Bishops Lydeard most passengers have travelled specifically to go on the railway and will buy a rover ticket, at Minehead many are just holiday visitors who want "a ride on the steam train". This means different things to different people and some have no idea what they want. I explain how long the journey is, what there is to see on the way, where to go for shorter journeys, what there is to see if they get off at intermediate stations and, of course, what it costs. The WSR day rovers are excellent value and the railway offers a great day out with lots to do, but not all see it like that. "How much...?!" Shorter trips to Blue Anchor or Watchet usually fit the bill where money or time is a concern. Inevitably I also get asked for railway tickets to places not served by the WSR and some not even on the national network!

The Booking Office is close to the sea front and opposite the Tourist Information Office. The latter is closed on Mondays except in July and August so I have to field a lot of general queries about things like buses, shops, car parking and banks. It is usually possible to help and it fills the time in less busy periods. The least enjoyable part of the job is the end-of-day accounting – calculating the value of tickets sold and then trying to match that with the takings (cash and card) and the numerous vouchers and coupons. Errors are inevitable and with volunteer staff a little leeway is allowed – but I did get it exactly right once! Overall I've found the work a great way to get to know how the WSR works and who does what, plus I've made friends among the staff and volunteers. This has opened up involvement in other areas, including contributing photographs to the 'unofficial' website www.wsr.org.uk and various WSR publications. There are material benefits too – a staff card gives free travel on normal timetabled trains and discounts at the Turntable Café and the Station Bookshop.



The WSR prints its own Edmondson tickets on a machine at Dunster station, seen here on 12th August 2015. Made by Waterlow & Sons in 1844 (see builder's plate above), this was purchased from Crewe in 1988, just after BR had ceased printing Edmondsons. It is also used to print tickets for many other railways as well as the WSR.



Incoming diesel excursions from the national network are usually worked top-and-tail through to Minehead and are sometimes piloted by WSR steam power. Here on 14th July 2015 the Cathedrals Express from Gravesend approaches Alcombe Crossing with 2-8-0 3850 piloting 47746 and 47760 bringing up the rear.



The Marlow Donkey

Photography

Living near the railway gives the opportunity for photography on the line all year round. One of the first things we did on arrival was to apply for Lineside Photographic Passes (LSP), for which we duly obtained a Personal Track Safety course and obtained PTS certification. However, after I managed to fracture a kneecap elsewhere in September 2014, with safety considerations in mind we did not renew our LSPs. My main regret is that I can't now go 'wrong side of the fence' into the signal box and surrounding area at Minehead station, but the WSR has ample opportunities for photography – each of the stations has a distinctive character and there are numerous public footpaths, road bridges and other viewpoints.

One advantage of being a volunteer is that I have access to the Working Timetables and Operations Notices and these give details of special trains, including engineering, empty stock and weed-killing trains. There are other workings not in the public timetable such as the Steam Engineman and Diesel Experience Courses and WSR training specials. These are scheduled using spare paths in the off-peak timetable or on 'No Booked Service' days, when they run under 'Travelling Signaller' arrangements and knowledge of these has provided scope for some different pictures.

Although one might expect that photography would be limited by a lack of locomotive variety, this has rarely proved to be the case. There are usually four steam locos available for regular use, but each year the need for major overhauls means that this pool changes. Locomotives such as 2-6-0 9351 and S&DJR 2-8-0 88 were withdrawn during 2014, while 2-8-0 3850 went in autumn 2015 and 2-6-2T 4160 at the end of the year. Ever present so far have been 4-6-0s 6960 *Raveningham Hall* and 7828 *Odney Manor*, while 4936 *Kinlet Hall* was added to the roster and 88 is due to return early in 2016. The Somerset & Dorset Railway Trust's 0-4-0ST *Kilmersdon* usually gets an outing at galas and special events. In all but the basic off-peak timetable there is a DMU working, but on various weekends during the summer (and occasionally at other times) diesels from the DEPG fleet take over the DMU diagram – this has meant the occasional Hymek, Warship, Western, Teddy Bear, class 47 or 33 to phot. Then there are visiting locos for the galas, which may arrive before the event and stay afterwards, so are often used on service trains or Steam Engineman Courses. During the summer there are also visiting steam and diesel locos off the main line, some of which work through to Minehead.

While preparing this article I did a quick count of all the locomotives I have photographed on the line in the two-and-a-bit years I have lived here. The total was 31 steam and 21 diesel, plus two DMUs, two p/w trolleys and a road/rail crane – and there are at least three diesels and two steam locos under restoration at Williton which I have not yet managed to photograph. Who could complain at that?



An unusual working where timings were available from the Ops notices was this training special for Good Guards, which ran between Bishops Lydeard and Williton on 8th April 2015. Here class 09 D4107 is approaching the Sampford Brett road bridge at Castle Hill with the return working.

www.mdrs.org.uk



One of the events that brings an influx of extra passengers is the annual Minehead Summer Festival in mid-August. This includes a display by the Red Arrows and there is an amended timetable to cope with the extra demand. On 12th August 2015 an extra return DMU working ran non-stop from Minehead to Blue Anchor and back immediately after the display to take pressure off the later trains. It is seen here passing Dunster.



Star attraction at the 2015 Autumn Steam Gala was Tornado which was put to use before the event on the Steam Engineman Course on Wednesday 30th September, seen here arriving at Minehead. Unlike 66757 two weeks previously, 60163 was too heavy for the Minehead turntable and had to work tender first in one direction throughout the gala, although for variety it was turned on the Norton triangle before working the Sunday trains.



In addition to the Steam courses, the WSR offers a regular Diesel Experience Course. During the time I have been here the regular performer on these trains has been class 33 D6575, seen here climbing away from Watchet at Splash Point on 10th October 2015.

FROM THE ARCHIVES



On 1st March 1979 the 125th anniversary of the “new” Paddington station was marked by running a special to Didcot and back behind 6000 *King George V* - the first steam-hauled departure since 1965. Unfortunately, it never got to Didcot after failing with a hot axlebox. Before that, it passes the gallery of photographers lining the cutting at Shottesbrooke.

Leaving aside the question of trespass! You would be hard pressed to use that vantage point today. See how the trees have sprung up as 70013 *Oliver Cromwell* passes with the return *Royal Wessex* from Swanage to Brighton on 30th June 2012. Catenary will rob us of even this angle in future.

Both photos: Mike Walker

