

BATH RAILWAY SOCIETY

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FEBRUARY NEWSLETTER 2019

Dear Member,

We had an excellent start to 2019 when at our January meeting guest speaker, Mike Fenton, talked about 'GWR Camping Coach Holidays' and the story of the company's 'Camp Coach'. This was certainly a trip back in time to a bygone era and part of our social history. We thank Mike for coming down from his home in Herefordshire and also for his musical entertainment as well as the talk!

Our next meeting will be on February 7 when we welcome Anna Holbrook from Network Rail and she will be telling us about 'The Western Rail Link to Heathrow Airport'. This is a proposed branch line to provide fast and easy connections to the airport from the west and which is planned to start from a junction east of Langley station on the Great Western Main Line and run through a 3-mile-long tunnel into Heathrow's Terminal 5 station. The project is also expected to generate £800m growth in the Thames Valley area. As usual, doors open at 7pm for a 7.30pm start. This presentation will finish at the break time and after tea & coffee Brian May will be giving a slide show reviewing slides he has taken in 2018. This will include Romanian narrow gauge steam in the snow, springtime in Bulgaria, farewell to the East Anglian 37's and semaphores and other slides from the year.

Our book store is doing well with good sales. If you have any un-wanted books, please bring them along with a suggested price on them. All monies will go towards Society funds, and all we ask is if you bring anything and it doesn't sell, could you please take it home again afterwards. Thank you.

The Pilning Station User Group have marked the second anniversary of the loss of their station footbridge by bringing out a video together with a song which is based on John Lennon's 'Imagine'. It can be found at www.pilningstation.uk The footbridge between the two platforms was demolished by Network Rail on November 5 2016, as part of the electrification of the South Wales Main Line, as it was too low to allow for the overhead wires and it was uneconomic to replace it. Currently only trains on the 'up' line stop at the station when heading for Bristol. Intending passengers wishing to alight in the 'down' direction have to travel on to Severn Tunnel Junction and change onto an 'up' service. There used to be a second station at Pilning (Low Level) which closed on November 23, 1964 on a line that originally ran round to Severn Beach.

Monday February 18 marks 90 years of passenger services from Bath's Oldfield Park Station and the Severnside Community Rail Partnership, in collaboration with GWR and the On Board volunteer group will be hosting a celebratory event at Oldfield Park Baptist Church, Triangle, Oldfield Park, between 4pm and 6pm. Light refreshments will be served. Further details of the drop in event can be found on the Eventbright page <https://goo.gl/tfif3R>

The Swindon & Cricklade Railway are operating a 'diesel only' service every Sunday during February. Trains run from 11am to 4pm, check the railway's website for details. The Avon Valley Railway will also be running a diesel service from their headquarters at Bitton station between February 16 -24 (except Monday & Friday) during the schools half term period. Diesel train

fares apply, again with the first departure being at 11am, then hourly until the last departure at 1600hrs.

Plans by the group who had hoped to rebuild and restore the site of the old Somerset & Dorset line station at Chilcompton seemed to have been abandoned following a public meeting and strong local opposition. This group is not associated with the Somerset & Dorset Railway Heritage Trust based at Midsomer Norton who hope to extend their working line towards Chilcompton.

The S & DRHT have hailed their Christmas Santa trains as a success and this was the first season that Santa and his Elves travelled on the trains from Midsomer Norton hauled by Sentinel 'Joyce'. This proved more popular than having Santa's grotto in a static carriage. One issue that did arise was no carriage heating, and this will be looked at and addressed before the next 'Santa' season. 'Joyce' being just a basic shunting locomotive is not fitted with steam heating apparatus.

Fifty years ago this month a very unusual event took place on February 21 1969. Warship Class D827 Kelly was at Tavistock Yard, Plymouth, waiting to depart with a fully fitted freight to Exeter Riverside. However, the GW main line had been closed as it was blocked by a heavy snow fall. A decision was taken to send the train over the former 'Southern' route from Plymouth to Exeter via Okehampton, but part of this line between Bere Alston and Meldon had been completely closed for 10 months! The driver knew the old SR line as he had worked it before closure, and the train did just get through, but it is rather bizarre that it was ever allowed to go over a route with effectively no knowledge of its condition, any form of signalling or staff controlling it. Another working over this closed line had also happened not long after closure when withdrawn coaches were stored at Lydford for a short period before being taken forward to Crediton for storage. There are also rumours that a Class 47 may have run over it light engine after closure as well, and if anyone has any further information on these unusual workings, I would be only too pleased to hear it. Please contact me at bob.bunyar@lineone.net

Did you know there was once a station called Woodcroft which did not feature on any maps! It was located on the Portsmouth Direct line between Petersfield and Rowlands Castle, to the south of Buriton Tunnel. The halt was built to serve a local naval establishment and because of its military nature it remained anonymous. It opened on October 4, 1943 and closed on October 1 1945, and was built after the Admiralty requisitioned Ditcham Park, a nearby country house for use as a convalescent home for sailors. After closure the station was demolished but a footbridge does still remain today.

On February Saturday 2, The Sodbury Vale Model Railway Club hold their 35th Annual Model Railway Exhibition at St Mary's Church Hall, Church Road, Yate, South Gloucestershire. This is right in the centre of Yate, and an easy walk from the Yate Shopping Centre Car Park. There will be at least 14 layouts on display and six trade stands in attendance. On Saturday 9 & Sun 10, Cale Rail and Gartell Light Railway hold their 14th Annual Model Railway Exhibition at the Gartell Light Railway, Common Lane, Yenston, near Templecombe. There are expected to be 12+ layouts and historical displays of Templecombe, trade stands and refreshments plus a train service on GLR, Admission Adults £4 (Model Railway show only) GLR train tickets excluded.

Between February 18 and March 8, the main line will be closed between Taunton and Exeter due to engineering works at Whiteball Tunnel. There will be alterations to services and diversions will take place using the former SR route from Yeovil to Exeter via Pinhoe. Do check times if you intend traveling to the West Country during this period.

Plans to restore the former Southern Railway paddle steamer 'PS Ryde' have now been abandoned. A deal had been signed in November to save it and move it for restoration, but during December it was found to be beyond repair as its structure was collapsing. Its remains will now be scrapped.

Trains on the Watercress Line (Mid – Hants Railway) will only be operating between Alresford and Medstead for at least the first half of this year with no trains running to Alton. This is due to the replacement of Butts Bridge at the former Butts Junction which once had lines run from the junction, on what is today's Mid Hants, up to Basingstoke and down through the Meon Valley. The original 1865 built bridge is being demolished and replaced to widen access into a new housing development. The line to Basingstoke closed to passenger traffic in 1932 and goods services were withdrawn in 1936 although a stub remained at either end of the line to serve a factory at Basingstoke and for shunting at Butts and this ceased in 1967. The last section of the Meon Valley line to close was from Butts Junction to Farringdon on August 13, 1968 when the last freight service ran. Passenger services had finished over the whole route from February 5, 1955. On January 5, 2019, the very last Mid Hants Railway train to use the old bridge was hauled by 41312 with detonators exploding beneath it as it crossed.

REQUESTS:-Would any member like to give a talk about the 'History of Railways' (or similar), to the residents of Bridgemoor Nursing home in St Johns Road, Bathwick? It need only be about 20/30 minutes in length. Also, a U3A (history of buildings) group are visiting Green Park Station (Sainsbury's) on February 11 and are looking for a guide? If you can help with either of these then please contact our Secretary Robert Howes for more details. Email address above or see him at the meeting.

We hope you will be able to attend our February meeting, but if not, it will be 53 years next month since the Somerset & Dorset line closed, so our next meeting will take us back in time to remember this well-known line. On Thursday March 7, Mike Beale will present 'The John Woods S & D Collection' at St Marys Church hall at 7.30pm. A must for all fans of this line!

Please note:- All events and special trains etc are mentioned in good faith and hopefully details are correct at the time of publication of the Newsletter. Please however, do check before travelling or attending events as things can change