

BATH RAILWAY SOCIETY

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FEBRUARY NEWSLETTER 2020

Dear Member,

For our first meeting of 2020, Alan Price told us all about 'The Vale of Berkley Railway Project' which aims to establish a Heritage Railway along the old Sharpness branch line. This was certainly a most informative talk taking us back in time with the history of the line and bringing us up to date with the aims of the Railway. We thank Alan for a most interesting evening and we hope to have him back in the future with another talk, but on a different subject.

On February 6 we welcome back to the Society, Amyas Crump who will be travelling up from his Devon home to entertain us. Amyas will be presenting 'Peter Gray's - West Country' a selection of photographs taken in the 1950 & 1960's. Peter, who sadly passed away in October 2017, had a vast knowledge, experience and photographic collection, of railways across the country and luckily Amyas is able to continue showing his work. As normal doors open at 7pm for a prompt 7.30pm start. This should be a nostalgic evening and one not to miss!

After several years of negotiation with South Gloucestershire Council the Avon Valley Railway have been granted a long lease of the railway site for the next 65 years giving them much long term security and the prospects of obtaining grants and the possibility of extending the line towards Bath (Newbridge). During January the railway have been undertaking track works south of the station to give a smoother ride. Trains will be running at the AVR this month during the half term holiday on February 15, 16, 18, 19, 20, 22 & 23. See their website for times and further details.

The Swanage Railway has also been undertaking Winter Track maintenance just north of Herston Halt to replace twenty two panels of track with brand new rail which has cost £60,000. They will be operating services during the February half term school holiday with children travelling free.

The Mid – Hants Railway should be re-opening along its entire length from February 14. The railway was truncated due to the construction of a new bridge at the former Butts Bridge Junction and had originally been planned to re-open last October but problems with foundations delayed this. The Railway will also be welcoming a special visitor this month as 60103 'Flying Scotsman' is due to visit and this should be hauling the re-opening train on the full length of line.

Further to the brief report last month, plans to re-open the Portishead line for passenger services have reached a milestone with the submission of the Development Consent Order (DCO) application. This is for the £116m MetroWest Phase 1, and will give powers to build and operate the disused section of line from Portishead to Pill, gain environmental consent to undertake works to the existing freight line and obtain powers for the compulsory acquisition of land. The Secretary of State for Transport is expected to make a decision regarding the DCO within 18 months and subject to approval, construction is expected to start in December 2021 and take around two years to complete. In the meantime the annual clearance of vegetation on the disused section of line will shortly take place.

For the first time since the closure of the former Somerset and Dorset line, a section of track bed just north of Shillingstone Station as far as Hammoon, approximately $\frac{3}{4}$ mile in length, has been put up for sale. This covers about a third of the route to Sturminster Newton and the trustees of the North Dorset Railway at Shillingstone are currently exploring the feasibility of buying it and looking for pledges of financial support. They need to raise at least £250,000. At present work is being carried out at Shillingstone station laying a crossover to the north of the signal box. The station site and Café is open on Wednesdays, Saturdays and Sundays from 10am until 4pm.

The future of the Dartmoor and Weardale Railway's is in doubt as the American owners of both lines have put them both up for sale on January 9. How this is going to effect the future heritage operations on the lines is not currently known. GWR runs a summer only Sunday's service from Exeter to Okehampton and they are also due to start a regular daily commuter service in the future on this line.

Fifty years ago this month on February 14, the Bath Branch of the Locomotive Club of Great Britain ran 'The Isis Rail Tour' Starting from Bristol T.M. and picking up at Bath Spa the train visited the Oxfordshire lines that then ran (freight only) to Abingdon, Witney and Bicester London Road. The three car DMU formed of unit 50679, 59271 & 50727 then ran down into Berkshire to traverse the branches to Wallingford and Welford Park (near Newbury to serve USA base) before returning to Bath and Bristol.

February 14 fifty years ago was also a notable day for Castle Class - 5051 'Dryslwyn Castle/Earl Bathurst' as it left Woodham Bros Yard at Barry Docks that day to be towed by rail to the GWS Depot at Didcot. It was withdrawn by BR as surplus to requirements, from Llanelli depot in 1963 having completed just over 1,300,000 miles in service. It arrived at Barry in October 1963 and it was the 4th locomotive to leave the yard for preservation having been there for six years and four months. Today it is still part of the GWS collection at Didcot, but currently out of boiler ticket.

The Sodbury Vale Model Railway Club hold their 35th Annual Model Railway Exhibition at St Mary's Church Hall, Church Road, Yate, South Gloucestershire on February 1. This is located an easy walk from the Yate Shopping Centre Car Park where there is plentiful free parking (Max stay 4 hours). Please note that there is only disabled parking adjacent to the Church. Yate Railway station is 0.76 of a mile from the event at which there will be at least 14 layouts and 17 trade stands. On Sat 8 & Sun 9 - Cale Rail and the Gartell Light Railway hold their 15th Annual Model Railway Exhibition at the Gartell Light Railway, Common Lane, Yenston, near Templecombe. There will be 10+ layouts, Historical Displays of Templecombe, Trade Stands and Refreshments from the Pines Buffet plus Train Service on the GLR. Admission Adults £4 (Model Railway show only) GLR train tickets excluded.

The Didcot Railway Centre will have four locos in use in February 15 & 16 when the hold a 'Delivering the Goods' event. This will feature Number 31 (visiting from the Fawley Hill Railway, 4144, D9516 and 08604. There will be special demonstration freight trains and wagon movements with the locos working passenger and goods trains on the Centre's two demonstration lines. Unlimited rides available. The centre will also be holding 'Steam Days' during the Half Term holiday on February 19, 22 and 23.

At the Swindon & Cricklade Railway, a diesel service will operate this month on February 16, 19 & 23. The Railway has also recently taken delivery of Railbus 79978 from the Colne Valley Railway. 79978, which is in need of restoration, has in some ways 'come home' as it was allocated to Swindon shed from new in 1958 until 1964 and was a regular performer on the two branches from Kemble to Cirencester and Tetbury before being transferred to North

Cornwall to work on the Bodmin North to Boscarne Junction route. Its last transfer was up to Scotland where it was withdrawn from service. It then entered preservation in August 1968.

Approval has been given to carry out gauge enhancements on the line from Bathampton Junction to Bradford Junction, including through the Dundas Aqueduct, for freight traffic. This work should also benefit some steam workings as this would lift the requirement for a number of locomotives to pass through the aqueduct at slow speed. No date has yet been given by Network Rail when the enhancement works will be carried out.

There will be engineering closures taking place on the Heart of Wessex line this month. On February 1 & 2, and 29 to March 1 the line will close south of Castle Carey, plus between February 15 to 21, it will be closed south of Yeovil Pen Mill. The works will involve replacing bridge decking at Yetminster, tunnel repairs at Poundbury and refurbishment works at Bradford Peverell. Further work in March will see track being replaced at Chetnole. GWR trains will mostly be effected, but some SWR services could also be subject to alteration between Yeovil and Castle Carey. Check before travelling.

Next month's meeting will be on Thursday March 5, when Nick Kelly will be telling us all about "Pier Railways and Tramways in Britain". Something a little different!

We look forward to seeing you all on Thursday February 6, for Amyas Crump's presentation, "Peter Gray's West Country".

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