

BATH RAILWAY SOCIETY

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MAY NEWSLETTER 2019

Dear Member,

At our last meeting on April 4, Brian Ringer brought us right up to date when he present 'Strictly Freight Part 3' completing his series of talks about the rail freight industry. All his presentations have been very informative and we thank him for travelling down from Milton Keynes to be with us.

Our next meeting will now be on Thursday May 9 when we welcome Michael Bunn as our guest speaker. He will be taking us across the English Channel and presenting the 'Railway History of Paris'. Please note, this meeting is not being held on the first Thursday of the month as is normal, but on the second Thursday of the month due to the hall being used for a polling station for local council elections. As always doors open at 7pm for a 7.30pm start at St Mary's church hall, Bathwick.

To give you advanced notice, our AGM will take place on Thursday June 6, at 7.30pm at St Marys Church Hall. We welcome any nomination for positions on the committee and these should be sent to the above addresses either by email or letter. Also if there are any matter you wish discussed at the AGM please also send these in. Following the AGM there will be a break and then guest speaker Mark Smith will give a talk on 'The Heritage Railway Association' which of course is an umbrella organisation for most of the heritage railways in this country. A talk not to be missed.

The book stall will be open for business at our May meeting and all books remaining will be priced at just £1 (or lower if indicated). There will not be a book stall at the AGM in June and we thank Mike Ware for all his efforts with the book stall this season which has helped to raise funds for the Society.

A Society visit is being organised to the Merehead and Whatley Quarry sites on Sunday June 23 following our talk on Mendip Rail by John Barlow & Robin Jacob in December 2018. If you are interested to participating please contact our Secretary, Robert Howes, address above, as soon as possible as spaces are limited. Further details will be sent out when confirmed.

The re-opening of the railway to Portishead for passenger traffic should now be progressing following an announcement that the Department for Transport will provide £31.9 million to plug a funding gap to assist local councils to get the scheme underway. New stations will be built at Portishead and Pill and there will also be enhancements to the Severn Beach line as part of the scheme.

Pilning station may be gaining a footbridge once again thus avoiding the need to travel through to Severn Tunnel Junction and back to alight. A redundant footbridge from Angel Road station in London has been identified as being suitable as it is high enough for the electrification wires to fit beneath it.

The GWS at Didcot are running their 1960s Western Region Class 14 "Teddy Bear" D9516 over the Bank Holiday weekend of May 4 – 6. It will be joined by visiting Class 14 D9551 and they will be running double and single headed train rides at various times over the three days.

The Swanage Railway's annual diesel gala will be taking place from Friday May 10 to Sunday May 12 with an intensive service in operation the full length of the line to the boundary with Network Rail at Bridge 4. Locos so far confirmed are D4 'Great Gable' Class 25 – D7535, Class 26 – 26007, Class 50 – 50007 (in its new GBRf livery), a Class 59 plus home fleet Class 33's D6515 and 33111. On May 9 there will be a 'themed day' titled "Type 2 Thursday" featuring D7535 and 26007 plus one resident steam locomotive. The Class 26 will be remaining on the line after the gala until September.

On May 25, a pair of DRS Class 37's are due to pass through Bristol Temple Meads at the head of a 'Retro Railtours' special from Huddersfield to Paignton. The train is routed via Stockport, Shrewsbury and Severn Tunnel Junction to Bristol. The same day the Bodmin & Wenford Railway are holding a diesel running day with an intensive timetable in operation followed on May 31 by a special day as they celebrate their 30th year anniversary of the line. For details go to www.bodminrailway.co.uk

Fifty years ago this month on May 5, the 10 mile section of line between Lewes and Uckfield in East Sussex (known as the Wealden Line) was closed under British Rail and Richard Beeching's Axe. Today campaign groups are pressuring the Department for Transport to re-open this route, although so far attempts have been rejected. Also half a century ago on May 31, the RCTS ran a special from London down to Somerset called "The Cheddar Valley Scenic Rail Tour". It ran from Paddington down to Whitham Junction taking the line through Shepton Mallet and Wells to the then terminus of the line at Cheddar. The tour retraced its route back to Whitham Junction where it reversed to go down to Taunton again reversing to visit various lines in the Bristol area including Wapping Wharf, Avonside, Mangotsfield, Yate and Clifton Down before returning to London via Bath Spa and Swindon.

On May 15, 35028 'Clan Line' is due to work the Belmond British Pullman from London Victoria through to Bath and Bristol and return.

May 18 will be the final day for HST operation into London Paddington, but refurbished short GWR 'Castle' sets will still operate in the South West and on services from there to Cardiff. All long-distance services on the franchise are due to become pure IET operations.

At another event on May 18, a film will be premiered at the Regal Theatre in Minehead. 'Chance Encounter' is a love story about a couple who met one summer and is based on a journey on the former Somerset & Devon Railway from Taunton to Barnstaple. The West Somerset Railway was used for some location filming and a drone was also used, flying along parts of the original old railway route to obtain views replicating looking out of the train windows. Some 300 guests to the world premiere of the film are being taken to Minehead by train from Bishops Lydeard.

On May 19, the 'Sundays only' services re-starts between Exeter and Okehampton. These run from St James station and call at Exeter Central and St Davids as well as Crediton and Sampford Courtenay. The service is operated by GWR and it will run through to September 8.

Network Rail are closing the line between Newbury and Westbury from Saturday May 4 to Bank Holiday Monday, May 6, to replace a bridge at Barnard's Lock, between Newbury and Kintbury. This will mean long distance services between London and the South West will be diverted through Swindon and journey times will vary. Buses will operate between Swindon and Pewsey and will also replace trains for local journeys between Newbury and Bedwyn. NR will also be carrying out further engineering work around Salisbury on May 19, and buses will be operating instead of a rail service between Warminster and Southampton.

Passenger numbers on the Tarka Line (Exeter – Barnstaple) are still on the increase. In 2017 the recorded passengers using the line were 672,144 but this figure was up to 679,952 for 2018.

The former MD of Chiltern Railways and now of Vivarail, Adrian Shooter will be permanently closing his private Beeches Light Railway this month, but reopening it at a new location close by in spring 2020. The two-foot gauge line has operated at its present site around his Oxfordshire home for some 15 years. Pending the opening of the new railway, Mr Shooter's locomotive No. 19 will spend this summer at the Launceston Steam Railway, a line it visited several years ago. We have invited Mr Shooter to BRS to give a presentation on Vivarail which is converting former underground D78 stock, with various modes of traction, the first of which went into service on April 23 for London Northwestern Railway on the Marston Vale Line. These former D78's are now classified as Class 230's.

The removal of the Weymouth Tramway is looking possible as Weymouth Council is planning major road improvements which could see the rails lifted, but Network Rail has yet to agree to this.

Finally, plans to raise the height of the sea wall at Dawlish by 2.5m to protect the railway line have been approved despite many objections. Network Rail now plan to start work on the project this year but will break off work during the high summer tourist season. A joint letter has however now been sent to the Secretary of State for Transport, Chris Grayling from local MP Anne Marie Norris, the Teignbridge Council's planning committee and the Dawlish Beach Media Director calling for a delay to the start of the project as they have serious concerns about the proposed wall's design as they feel it will cause more flooding in Dawlish's Marine Parade during high tides and storms.

We hope to see you on Thursday May 9 for our next meeting or if not, at the AGM on June 6.

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