

BATH RAILWAY SOCIETY

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DECEMBER NEWSLETTER 2019

Dear Member,

Rupert Singleton talked about 'The Redevelopment of London Bridge Station' at our November meeting, telling us all about the phases of the rebuilding and extension works to this very busy station and we thank him for visiting us. We are aware that some of you unfortunately had difficulty hearing this presentation and despite getting out the PA system at the break this only worked intermittently. The committee is looking into this problem and hope to resolve it as soon as possible.

Our next meeting will be taking us overseas on Thursday December 5 when Matthew Searle will be our guest speaker presenting 'Switzerland on the Steep & Narrow'. Hopefully there won't be snow around in this Country on that date, but you may well see some on the screen! As usual the start is at 7.30pm prompt and doors open at 7pm. As this is our Christmas meeting I am told mince pies will also be available with the tea/coffee at the break.

As previously announced, on December 15, GWR will be introducing the biggest timetable change on their network since 1976. They say they will be 'bringing faster, more frequent services with thousands more seats and around three quarters of journey times will be different from how they are now with trains arriving and departing at different times. Trains won't always stop at the stations they do today'.

It would appear from the timetable that at Bath Spa, services to London will still operate at 13 minutes past and 43 minutes to the hour with additional 'peak' trains provided. Services to Portsmouth do not seem to have changed much with the same start times from Cardiff and calling times at Bath. One new ticket opportunity will be to travel to Portsmouth via Reading and Winchester (where changes of train are required), but with much higher fares than via Salisbury! Services to/from Weymouth see little change with no improvements to give faster times or more frequency. Some branch lines in Devon & Cornwall will certainly benefit from the timetable change with more frequent and extra services, but you should check before making any journeys after December 15 as they may well have changed from the present timetable. It should also be noted that Reading to London Paddington local stopping services will be transferred from GWR to Transport for London from the timetable change.

A new station operated by GWR is due to open on December 15. Worcester Parkway will be served by Cross Country services between Nottingham and Cardiff on its lower platforms situated on the Birmingham to Bristol main line. GWR services will call at platforms on the Cotswold Line giving direct services on the Paddington to Worcester & Hereford route. It will have 500 car parking spaces.

As usual Christmas engineering works will be taking place across the rail network and again you should check before attempting to travel. The programme of upgrade work generally starts on Tuesday December 24 with normal train services resuming on Thursday January 2. On the GWR network, the main works will be taking place as follows:- London to Slough/Reading - Tuesday 24 to Friday 27 December where there is to be track and overhead wiring works in the Southall area and trains won't run between London Paddington and Slough/Reading. On Saturday 28 to Tuesday 31 further track work takes place between London Paddington and

Reading with a reduced service running between London Paddington and Slough/Reading In South Wales from Friday December 27 to Wednesday January 1 track work is taking place in the Newport area and overhead testing work is being done at Cardiff Central with electric trains due to start running there from January 6. Road coaches will be in use between Bristol Parkway and Cardiff Central or Bridgend. At Guildford bridge work is taking place from Friday December 27 to Tuesday 31 affecting The Reading - Gatwick services and road coaches will be used between North Camp, Guildford, Redhill and Gatwick Airport.

The estimated costs to re-instate the railway line from Bere Alston to Tavistock has risen by £23M from £70M to £93M. Due to this rise, Devon County Council is not at present actively lobbying Central Government for funding for this scheme. It was planned this line would form part of the Devon Metro services to alleviate traffic congestion into Plymouth from Tavistock.

40 Years ago this month F & W operated an interesting rail tour on December 29 - The Sulzer Surveyor, and in fact it was two trains, one from Plymouth and the other from Worcester Shrub Hill to Weymouth and a trip down the Quay branch. Both tours used the mix of the same motive power over different legs of their journeys with 47004 from Plymouth to Weymouth via Bath where 33103 over the Weymouth Quay line. This train returned to Westbury via Southampton behind 46051 where 47004 took over to return to Plymouth. The other train from Worcester was hauled to Weymouth via Swindon and Melksham by 46051 with 33103 again being used for a run down the quay line. This train then returned to Westbury behind 47004 where 46051 took over back to Worcester Shrub Hill. Quite an interesting working using these locos!

10 Years ago this month Stage 1A of the South Wales re-signalling programme commenced with the opening of the South Wales Control Centre (SWCC) which initially signalled trains between Patchway (the fringe to Bristol PSB) and East Usk. Further stages of the scheme then covered the main line routes and the Valley Lines with the older signal boxes being abolished in the majority of locations.

Mentioning signalling, a Signal Box will be returning to its original home line from a garden in Somerset. A small signal box that was purchased and moved from the Sharpness branch in 1984 is being taken back to the now Vale of Berkley Railway preservation project in Gloucestershire from the garden in Frome. At our first meeting of 2020, on January 2, we will be welcoming as our guest speaker, Alan Price, who will be telling us about 'The Vale of Berkley Railway Project. The V of B Rly could also benefit from a proposal to re-open Berkley Road station on the Bristol Gloucester main line as 3,900 new houses are going to be built in the area over the next 20 years. These are being promoted by Stroud District Council, and the new station would be built near the site of the original one that closed in 1965 and was subsequently demolished.

Looking ahead to January 18, 2020, Pathfinder Tours are running a DRS "Class20 Farewell" charter tour which starts at Bristol T.M. and picks up at Parkway. The train will be hauled to York by a pair of 57/0's where a pair of 20's take over for a run over the Harrogate Circle and then to Leeds for a lunch break before heading for Crewe where the 20's come off. A Class 68 returns the train to Bristol.

On December 7 the annual Bristol & South Gloucestershire Methodists hold their annual Carols and Steam event at the Avon Valley Railway featuring the Bristol East and Kingswood Brass Band. Times are 6.45pm for 7pm at Bitton Station. Tickets are £7.00, book with Clive Sutton 0117 932 3978

By the time you read this Newsletter, many of our major local heritage railways will be running their annual Christmas 'Santa Specials'. In addition, the Somerset & Dorset Railway Heritage

Trust at Midsomer Norton Station will be running Santa trains on December 1, 8, 15 & 22. The Pontypool and Blaenavon Railway are operating on December 1, 7, 8, 14, 15, 21 & 22 and at the Didcot Railway Centre on the same dates they have a well-known blue engine when they hold 'Festive Day's Out with Thomas the Tank'. Full details are available on all the Railway's websites.

After Christmas there is still plenty of 'steam' activity available. The West Somerset Railway will be running December 27 to January 1 incl. with a 'Winter Steam Festival' on 29 & 30. The Gloucestershire and Warwick Railway are operating December 26 – January 1 as are the Swanage Railway and the latter are holding their annual 'Winter Warmer Gala' on December 28. Nearer to home the Avon Valley are running 'Mince Pie Specials' on December 29 and January 1. Check websites for full details.

Cardiff Hendre Lakes is a proposed new business district that will be served by Cardiff Parkway, a new station on the South Wales main line. The proposed development, which is in its early stages of planning, is located to the south of St Mellons Business Park and east of Cardiff Central station.

The Somerset & Dorset Heritage Trust at Midsomer Norton have purchased a BR Mk1 Restaurant Miniature Buffet (RMB) coach from the Swanage Railway and it should have now been delivered.

South Western Railway staff who are members of the RMT are about to start a 27 day strike. An emergency timetable will be in operation with only about 50% of normal services running. No services are likely to operate west of Salisbury to Yeovil Junction and Exeter, and also no SWR services will serve the Salisbury to Bristol route together with services to Frome, Bruton and Yeovil Pen Mill.

We hope to see you on December 5 but if you are unable to attend we send you best wishes for Christmas and hope to see you in the New Year for our meeting on January 2. (See details above)

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