

NEWSLETTER JANUARY 2018
Posted December 31 2017

A Happy New Year to you and I hope you enjoyed our final meeting of 2017 when Alex Green presented 'The Regional Railways Story'. This was certainly an interesting topic, particularly to hear about the politics involved with Railways. I'm sure we all learnt a few things we hadn't known before! We thank Alex for taking the time to visit us from his home in Templecombe. Our grateful thanks must also go to Mike & Davina Ware for organising the raffle, which was funded through the book stall, and again to Davina and her helpers for the seasonal refreshments and serving the teas and coffee.

Our first meeting of 2018 will be on Thursday January 4 when Brian May will be presenting 'Whilst I've Been Away: A Photographers Diary 2013 – 2017'. As Brian explained at the December meeting, this will be an evening of photographs he has taken on his travels from both the UK and Overseas during the last four years. Brian has entertained us in the past with his excellent photographs and this will certainly be an evening not to miss. As usual doors open at 7pm for a 7.30pm start.

The book stall will be back at our January meeting, so if you have any unwanted books, do bring them along marked with a suggested price. Please check at the end of the meeting to see if they have sold and if not, would you take them home again. There could be a book you're after at a bargain price, so do look to see what's on sale. All monies raised from the book stall go to Society funds.

You may well have seen that the Department for Transport (DfT) announced on November 29 its strategy for the UK rail industry, and its plans for the future of the Great Western franchise. It also confirmed it will extend the current GWR franchise by 12 months until April 2020 and further discussions will also take place which could see them awarding another two more years again on the franchise. The DfT is also asking for views on future services across the G.W. network and have issued a fifty seven page document/questionnaire which can be viewed or downloaded at <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/great-western> The consultation closes on February 21 at 1145pm and views are sought from all stakeholders and users of G.W. services.

Great Western Railway Class 387 Electrostars are due to commence operating between London Paddington and Didcot from January 2 when a further section of the GW main line is energised. This will allow further Class 165 & 166 Turbo Units to be cascaded west.

Planners in charge of re-opening lines and stations in the Bristol area are being urged to once again consider restoring services to Thornbury from Yate. Currently the line is still in situ to Tytherington quarry with the section beyond to Thornbury lifted. Another line from Yate, the former Midland line into Bristol, will see a rail tour run over the remaining stub down to Westerleigh oil terminal on January 13. This is being organised by Pathfinder Tours and it is also due to visit freight lines to Sharpness and Machen being worked by a Class 60 and 66 in top 'n' tail mode over these branches.

The short list has been announced for the Heritage Railway Association awards for 2017. Those nominated include the Perrygrove Railway in Gloucestershire (Outstanding Visitor Attraction), The Gloucester & Warwickshire Railway for Hayes Abbey Halt (Large Group Category), The Lynton & Barnstaple Railway for new loco Lyn & Carriages together with the Gwili Railway for the Abergwili Extension (for Outstanding Achievements) and the Swanage Railway for returning passenger services to Wareham (Award for Excellence). All the winners will be announced at a ceremony on February 10.

London's Waterloo station is again the most used station in the UK with 99,403,096 using it in the period 2016-17 a slight increase on the 2015-16 period. Cardiff Central had a slight drop in usage while Coombe on the Looe branch saw its numbers rise from 48 to 212. Pilning also had an increase from 46 to 230 and Okehampton's Sunday Only summer service went up to 5928 from 3036.

The first train in 57 years ran into Broadway station, now part of the Gloucester & Warwickshire Railway, on Saturday December 23. Shortly after the last rails were laid by the Railway's permanent way workers to connect up the station tracks, E6036 slowly propelled an engineering train into the platform where a celebratory cup of tea was then taken. It is planned that the line to Broadway will be opened to the public by March 30 this year.

Fifty years ago this month on January 10 1968 the Barnstaple Junction to Torrington Line, which had closed to passenger traffic on October 4 1965, was quickly brought back into emergency use to provide passenger services between Bideford and Torrington stations. This was after an arch of the road bridge at Bideford, over the River Torridge, collapsed and completely cut the town in two, due to serious flooding caused by severe storms which also had blocked the Exeter – Barnstaple railway line early on 9 January. Stock for this emergency service could not be brought in from elsewhere and had to be made up from what was available in North Devon at the time. A Centre car from a DMU, being used on the Ilfracombe line, was requisitioned to provide passenger accommodation together with an SR bogie parcels van for the guard, this being hauled by Class 22 D6336. This ran on January 10 and 11 with the loco having to run round at Torrington, but on the return run having to go back ECS from Bideford to Instow to run round as it could not do this movement at Bideford. There was no service provided on the Friday January 12 and the following day the flooding on the Exeter – Barnstaple line had subsided which allowed Class 122 W55014, a single unit railcar, to be drafted in to operate a service between Bideford and Torrington. The unit was stabled at Barnstaple Junction overnight and ran empty to/from Bideford each day. An hourly service was provided from early morning to early evening departing from Bideford at 30 minutes past the hour but with the train running back to Barnstaple at lunchtime ECS for a crew change. This temporary service, which enabled people to get to the other side of the river by using the train and a connecting bus to/from Torrington, was provided to passengers free of charge with the services being paid for by the local council. It ceased on January 19, 1968 once the army had installed a temporary footbridge over the River restoring access to the two halves of the town.

One hundred years ago this month on January 4, 1918 the Steam Ship 'Iolanthe' was heading for the Isle of Wight with its hold full of standard gauge railway trucks and rails bound for the war effort in Europe. At 1105 pm after passing Portland Bill a torpedo fired from the German submarine UC75 struck the port side of the 'Iolanthe' by its number 3 hold and it started to take on water. The 'Iolanthe' was turned and an attempt made to get back to Portland, but it began to get lower in the water and eventually sank upright at a depth of 42 metres after its 31 crew members had been safely rescued. The wreck of 'Iolanthe' was not discovered until 1994 and it is now well broken up and collapsed, but her cargo of decaying railway trucks, can still be clearly seen by the experienced divers who occasionally visit her.

There are a number of model railway exhibitions in the area this month. On the weekend of January 6 (10am – 5pm) & 7 (10am – 4.30pm) the Somerset & Dorset Trust hold their annual exhibition at Erdington Village Hall near Bridgwater with at least 8 layouts and 3 trade stands in attendance. The same weekend at the Cheese & Grain in Market Road in Frome, the Wessex Association of Model Railway Clubs will have 14 layouts and 9 trade stands at their exhibition featuring 'N' to 'O' Gauge. On January 14, the Weston Hospice Care annual exhibition will take place at 'The Campus' Highlands Lane, Locking Castle, Weston Super Mare from 10am to 4.30pm with 28 layouts on display and 12 trade stands in attendance. The Bentley Model Railway Group will hold the Calne Model Rail Show at

the local leisure centre in White Horse Way on January 20 & 21 with 18 display layouts and 15 trade stands attending. Everything '0' Gauge will be at the University of the West of England, Filton Road, when the Bristol '0' Gauge Group hold their annual exhibition on January 28 from 10am to 4pm. There will be 10 layouts and 70 trade stands. Admission is £9.

Crowdfunding for the Swanage Railway's T3 has raised £4,196 but this is not the only way the Railway has been fundraising as with other donations the total has now reached over £44,000 in 2 months. The loco is now at the Flour Mill in the Forest of Dean and a strip down of it will be started shortly to ascertain its condition and what will be required to return it to operational condition if possible.

At our next meeting on February 1, we will be taken on a local journey with 'Steam Around Bristol' presented by Gerry Nichols. Again a show of great interest and not to be missed. More details in the next newsletter, and we look forward to seeing you on January 4 for Brian May's presentation.

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