

NEWSLETTER NOVEMBER 2017

Posted October 31 2017

Cyril Parsons gave us a most informative show on 'Mail Rail and The Post Office Railway' at our October meeting. He covered the history of the former Post Office underground railway that has now opened at Mount Pleasant as a tourist attraction. This was once again another interesting show and subject, and we thank Cyril for his time in coming to Bath from Buckinghamshire.

For our November meeting on Thursday 2, we welcome Steve Nakoneczny who will be showing us a selection of colour slides by celebrated photographer Keith Pirt. The photos were taken during the heyday of post-war steam and will give us a nostalgic glimpse of that lost golden age. They cover all the regions of British Rail. As usual, doors open at St Mary's church hall for a prompt 7.30pm start.

It is with regret that I have to announce the passing of long standing member Ralph Clark shortly before his 94th birthday. Ralph was on the Society's committee from 1971 and was one of our auditors from 1978 until he stood down in 2015. Other roles he undertook included helping on the door collecting the visitor's fees. Before his retirement Ralph had worked for the Gas Board in Bath and he was a keen railway modeller having a large layout in his attic. He was a very longstanding member of the choir at St Mary's Church (where we hold our meetings) until January this year and his funeral service will take place there on Monday November 6, at 11.30am. Ralph attended our 60th Anniversary Dinner in May and emailed after to say 'how much he enjoyed it'. His wife Jo died several years ago and he is survived by his sons Stuart and Paul to whom we send our condolences.

Sadly the well-known railway photographer and historian Peter Gray has also passed away at the age of 89. Peter's railway photography is renowned featuring in many publications and in the shows he gave around the country parting his knowledge to railway groups and society's, and indeed, he visited us on quite a number of occasions giving memorable evenings. His presentations were mostly of a West Country theme from the 1950 and 60's era covering main and branch lines (with many of the latter now long gone) of both the former Western and Southern regions. Peter lived in Torquay and his cremation took place there on Wednesday 25 October with a retiring collection taking place in aid of the South Devon Railway, Great Western Society and The Railway Mission.

There should be some steam workings in the area towards the end of this month. On Saturday November 25, 'The Christmas Cheshireman' will originate at Bristol TM and run via Hereford to Chester either behind 70013 'Oliver Cromwell' or 45305. On Thursday 30 'The Bath Christmas Market' operates from Poole to Bath due to be hauled by A4 Class - 60009 'Union of South Africa'. On November 25, 'The Christmas Statesman' from Derby-Leicester-Luton will be heading for Bath behind a Class 47 or 57 diesel.

On Saturday November 11, the 'Thorncombe Modelx 2017' will be taking place at the village hall, Chard Street, Thorncombe (near Chard) with 15 + model railway layouts and six trade stands. Also on the same day, the West Wilts Gauge 0 Group are staging the Westbury Model Railway Show at The Paragon Hall, Haynes Road, Westbury with nine layouts and eight trade stands. Later in November on the 25 & 26, the Burnham Model Railway Club are due to stage the 'Sedgemoor Rail Pre-Christmas Show' at King Alfred School, Burnham Road, Highbridge with layouts from 'N' to '0' Gauge.

Three masts will need to be erected for the GSM-R driver signaller system when commuter services are commenced between Exeter and Okehampton, hopefully starting in late 2018 operated by GWR. Devon County Council has now started preparing the car park area for a proposed Okehampton Parkway which will be east of the existing station and which will be built in a Business Park. In separate works at Okehampton station, the track through Platform 2, a dead end line, has been extended by a further 180m. This is so the whole rake of the 'Polar Express' can be stabled there.

Pathfinder Tours are operating two tours from the area next month. On December 9 they are heading to the City of Lincoln with the 'Lincoln Shire Explorer'. (Arr 1230 – dep 1700 approx.) The train will be hauled by a DB Cargo Class 67 with pickups locally at Weston Super Mare, Yatton, Bristol Temple Meads & Parkway, Cam & Dursley and Cheltenham Spa. (Other options are available for a destination – see website) On Saturday 16, they are setting off from Westbury and Chippenham for a tour of unusual lines, junctions and destination in central England. This train is called 'The Jolly Grid' and will be hauled by a DB Cargo 66 and then a Colas Rail Class 56. Full details of both tours can be found on the Pathfinder website at www.pathfindertours.co.uk or Tel: (01453) 835414.

Looking ahead, if you're planning to travel by rail over the Christmas period, do check in advance due to major engineering projects taking place throughout the country. On GWR, Paddington station will be closed on December 24 & 27. Limited services will then operate to/from Paddington from December 28 to 31 inclusive. Southampton Central will also close from December 24 until January 1 with services to Portsmouth diverted. GWR trains to Gatwick Airport will also be effected due to closure of the line from Reigate to Gatwick from December 24 to New Year. Most train companies will of course not be operating services on December 25 & 26.

Looking back - 50 years ago this month, on Sunday November 5, Forty-nine people were killed and 78 injured when a 12 car formation Hastings Unit derailed outside of London near Hither Green at 2116hrs whilst working a Hastings to London Charing Cross service. The train was formed of units 1007 and 1017 with 11 coaches derailling, four of which turned on their sides. A subsequent investigation concluded that a broken rail had caused the accident. Locally the section of the old Somerset & Dorset line from Bath Junction to Bath's Co-op Siding, (officially the Bath & Twerton Co-op Private Siding - 0m 68c from Bath Junction) was closed to remaining freight traffic from November 3, 1967, although it is not known when the last train ran up from Bath Junction to serve it. (Does anyone know when this occurred?) Trains could however still be seen on this section of line as track lifting by contractors was underway in the vicinity of Wellow station. Ten years later (40 years ago this month) on November 19, 1977 Class 33 – 33025 (still with us but now currently out of service with West Coast Railway) passed through Bath spa working a BR Day Excursion Train from Clapham Junction to Swansea via Salisbury, North Somerset & Dr Days Junctions at Bristol, returning via the outward route. Only 20 years ago on November 15 1997, steam locos – Moguls 2968 and 7325 were seen at Bath working 'The Hardy Flyer' to Weymouth. The train, organised by Pathfinder Tours had originated at Wolverhampton with the steam working from and back to Bristol Temple Meads.

The Avon Valley Railway will be holding a Gala Weekend on November 4 & 5. This will feature a variety of their locomotives operating both passenger and freight workings during both days plus visiting 0-6-0 Haydock Foundry tank engine 'Bellerophon', Santa Specials start running at the AVR on November 26 & 26 and the Railway is now offering dates for their 2018 Driver Experience Courses. These make excellent Christmas presents! For full details go to www.avonvalleyrailway.org

The only remaining Class 15 Clayton - D8568 will be the star attraction at the South Devon Railway's Winter Diesel Gala from November 3 to 5 incl., the first time a '15' has run in Devon. This unique loco from the Chinnor & Princes Risborough Railway will be joining home fleet locomotives D6975, D7612, D3721, D2246 and W55000. Full details at www.southdevonrailway.co.uk

The Somerset & Dorset Railway Heritage Trust are slowly extending their running line from Midsomer Norton towards the infilled cutting north of Chilcompton Tunnel (currently used by the Midsomer Norton Target Shooting Club) where it is proposed to build a station, Chilcompton Tunnel Halt. Track and sleepers have been purchased for this extension, but the S & D RHT is still appealing for funding to complete the works as ballast, fencing and other track items still have to be

purchased. (Donations can be made via their website www.sdjr.co.uk/fundraising). The Railway's signalling team have just built a distinctive S&DJR twin rail signal, based on the Evercreech Junction North down branch fixed distant. It is the first of its type to be built since the 1890s with the heavy L&SWR spectacle casting coming from the Moorewood Sidings up distant - a favourite prop in Ivo Peter's photography. The signal has been painted exactly as it appeared in 1962 in many of Ivo's pictures.

We look forward to seeing you all on Thursday November 2 at St Mary's Church Hall at 7.30pm for the presentation by Steve Nakoneczny. Our final meeting of this year will be on December 7 when Alex Green will be presenting 'The Regional Railways Story'.

Please note:- All events and special trains etc are mentioned in good faith and hopefully details are correct at the time of publication