

West Somerset Railway Association

Supporting the Heritage of The West Somerset Railway

An aerial photograph of a steam train crossing a stone bridge over a river. The train consists of a green locomotive pulling several passenger coaches. The bridge is made of red brick and spans a wide river. The surrounding landscape is green and hilly, with a coastal area visible in the background. The sky is blue, and there are some boats on the water.

Annual report for 12 months ending 31 March 2021

Contents

Page 3 Chairman's report

Page 7 The effects of the Covid pandemic on the West Somerset Railway

Page 11 Our projects

Page 17 Volunteering & community engagement

Page 21 Heritage engineering skills

Page 23 Supporting the West Somerset Economy

Page 24 Our Accounts

Page 27 Thank you to all our supporters

Page 28 Meet our staff & trustees

Chairman's Report

Mike Sherwood, Chairman of Trustees

The West Somerset Railway Association is a charity whose aims are:

“to promote education in the heritage of the railway from Taunton to Minehead by restoring, preserving and displaying railway locomotives, carriages, wagons and other artefacts (including documents, drawings, photographs, recordings and films) of historical interest and the buildings connected therewith.”

It has some 3000 members, who pay subscriptions to support the charity, and draws on the services of a small core of 2.4 (FTE) paid staff and many volunteers to carry out its aims, which include:

- To enable individuals and external corporate organisations to have a supportive and interactive role with the West Somerset Railway;
- To channel the support of those individuals and external corporate organisations, so that it is beneficial to the development of the West Somerset Railway;
- To promote the historical and heritage aspects of the West Somerset Railway, including appropriate support to allow continued running of heritage trains on the line;



(Don Bishop)

- To engage with young people, and to educate people of all ages, in the potential and excitement of active involvement in a heritage railway;
- To raise funds, through the members, through appeals, through grant applications and in any other appropriate way to support the development and sustainability of the West Somerset Railway as a heritage operation; and
- To work collaboratively, and in a mutually supportive and open way, with all other organisations supporting the West Somerset Railway, and in particular the West Somerset Railway PLC, through the Partnership Development Group and any other appropriate forum.
- The restoration and maintenance of heritage locomotives and rolling stock and promoting the associated heritage engineering skills.

These aims enable the charity to enable education of people in an understanding of the heritage aspects of the West Somerset Railway. Its long term goal is to ensure the maintenance of the railway's heritage equipment and infrastructure and to work with the West Somerset Railway PLC and other organisations which support the railway, to improve the arrangements for the public to see all aspects of how the railway is run. It will measure these successes by condition surveys of heritage items, and footfall in places where such viewing arrangements are improved.

The Association could not function without volunteers. In 2020 we had two main areas:

- Administration: nearly 2,000 hours.
- Steam Fayre and Vintage Vehicle Rally: at least 500 hours for the planning of the event which were then forced to cancel at short notice.

Achievement and performance was severely blunted during the year due to the effects of the Covid pandemic and the legislation in the UK that forced the railway to remain closed for the bulk of the year. The railway was able to run some limited services before Christmas due to an easing of the restrictions. Inevitably the railway being closed impacted on the work of the charity.

Despite the difficulties, the Association raised £260,990 and have now focussed their fundraising efforts on the three major funds discussed below.

The Locomotive Restoration Fund was established to secure the long term future of locomotives operating on the WSR, principally through the refurbishment of two locomotives owned by the Association: Small Prairie 4561 and Manor Class 7821, Ditcheat Manor. Just over £53,000 was raised for this fund during the year and the available total is just under £132,000. Work is now well advanced on the restoration of Small Prairie 4561, it was hoped to achieve a rolling chassis during 2021 but the pandemic and the discovery of a potential problem with the driving axle of the locomotive set this objective back a little.

Discussions have commenced about the overhaul of Ditcheat Manor. We will, look sympathetically to assist restoration of all locomotives that form part of the “home fleet” on the WSR where agreements that keep the locomotive on the railway are in place or where the locomotives are owned by the operating company.

The Preserve and Protect Fund has been established with the aim of providing covered accommodation for the railway’s rolling stock and in particular the heritage items of rolling stock. The fund will also be used eventually to help with the ongoing maintenance costs of rolling stock. We are currently operating this initiative jointly with the West Somerset Railway Heritage Trust and all restored items of Heritage rolling stock will be the early priority. Nearly £22,000 raised.

The Rail Renewal Fund has now formally been established to provide funding for the replacement of the permanent way of the West Somerset Railway, £41,000 raised during the year. The focus of the WSRA will be to principally provide funds for the replacement of heritage bullhead rail laid on wooded sleepers within the station limits of each of the 10 stations along the line.



(Don Bishop)

However we are mindful of the need to ensure the whole 22 miles of the railway are maintained in a good condition to allow the safe operation of trains.

The railway is a major heritage leisure attraction in West Somerset, with some 200,000 visitors per year, who contribute £9 million annually to the local economy. The operation of the railway is carried out by the West Somerset Railway PLC, a not-for-profit Company, which the Association works collaboratively with and supports.

As well as supporting and helping to finance things like track maintenance and locomotive and rolling stock restoration and preservation, the Association focusses on two other important areas: promotion of heritage engineering skills and volunteering. We see these as vital to our aim of promoting education.

Volunteering provides a way in which skilled older volunteers can pass their skills on to others. It also provides new volunteers with the opportunity to learn new skills. Both benefit from the sense of purpose and achievement, development of networks and friendships and sense of achievement that volunteering brings. This is particularly the case in the heritage engineering skills needed to restore and maintain the railway's locomotives and stock.



(Don Bishop)

The effect of the Covid-19 pandemic on the West Somerset Railway

Operating a heritage railway in the 21st Century

Geoff Garfield, WSRA Vice Chairman

Heritage steam railways occupy a special place in British culture, as evidenced by the fact that there are over 200 preserved railways and tramways throughout the country. The West Somerset Railway is a significant part of the heritage, being the UK's longest full-size steam railway, and still operating over its original route. Evidence of our special place can be found in some figures: over 200,000 people visit the railway in a “normal” year, welcomed by almost 1,100 volunteers. Those efforts are particularly important in West Somerset, a district with low social mobility, where the economy relies heavily on tourism.

However, operating a living museum which offers a 1950's experience but achieves 21st Century standards of safety and service is a major challenge. Heritage assets are alarmingly expensive to restore & maintain, and this work must be done to today's safety standards and best practice. For example, the WSRA has two steam locomotives for restoration. The smaller one, which is becoming close to completion, will have cost over £300,000; restoration of the larger one is likely to cost significantly more. For this reason, the WSRA, a registered charity, exists to raise capital funds for the restoration and preservation of the heritage assets, while a separate operating company, West Somerset Railway plc runs the trains and all the associated infrastructure. Their business model relies on earning sufficient income from visitors each spring, summer and autumn to pay for the necessary expert technical and operational staff and to carry out essential maintenance during the winter closed season.

The effect of the Covid-19 restrictions

Because of the lockdowns imposed by the government it was impossible to start the 2020 operating season. It also prevented the completion of the winter maintenance programme. Even when the restrictions were eased in May 2020 the operating company judged that the numbers of fare-paying customers that could be safely allowed on to the trains would be insufficient to meet the cost of running them. Because of that, and the subsequent government restrictions, the railway has remained closed throughout the

2020 operating season, while running a limited service over Christmas.

The financial effects were potentially disastrous. In effect, the operating company was faced by three winters: times when there is no income, but costs remain. Lockdown restrictions were accompanied by financial assistance packages from both central & local government: all appropriate assistance was applied for and granted. However, there remained serious concern that the operating company would be unable to survive until a proposed reopening in 2021.

The response from the railway, its supporters and government

Initially, the operating company raised funds from volunteers and supporters, who contributed a total of £268,226. Fundraising this way was necessary because the Charity Commission does not allow a charity to directly subsidise an operating company. However, the Commission and the Trustees recognised that the circumstances needed some flexibility, so Trustees agreed a £70,000 loan to the operating company, secured by a charge on heritage assets, which protected the charitable funds in a worst-case scenario. In August, government announced a Cultural Heritage Recovery Fund, and invited bids for grants recognising the extraordinary threats to heritage organisations. The operating company, with active support from the charity, applied for £856,000, which was granted in October. With other grants and subsidies, a total of £1,161,754 was raised during the year. Thus, the West Somerset Railway was able to survive financially until paying services resumed in Spring 2021.

We saw an important need to keep our many supporters and volunteers engaged with the railway during the enforced closure. WSR TV was developed to meet that objective. It was hosted on the YouTube platform. A small



(Don Bishop)

team undertook the original development, and it was supported across the railway. There are now 78 videos on the platform, with 57,150 views, and the top 17 items have been viewed between 1000 and nearly 2000 times each. We are currently expanding this initiative as a means of engaging with a wider audience. An enlarged team of volunteers is currently being trained to create short, professional quality posts which will inform and educate visitors about the many heritage items they encounter



(Don Bishop)

Effect on our charity

The WSRA was not immune from the consequences of Covid-19. The charity holds an annual educational and fundraising event, the Steam & Vintage Vehicle Rally, each August. This normally raises some £40,000, but it had to be cancelled in 2020 because of lockdown. Normal fundraising activity was also severely curtailed. However, with the aid of a local Authority grant, and a magnificent award of £50,000 from the Julia & Hans Reusing Charity survival fund, the financial position at March 2021 looked positive.

What is the current situation?

In many ways, the financial prospects for the year April 2021 to March 2022 are even more challenging. This is because government and local authority grants are no longer available, and normal fundraising activity is still restricted by the effects of the pandemic. Although restrictions were lifted in August 2021, this came too late to allow us to run our major fundraising event, reducing our planned income by some £40,000. Other fundraising activities were also constrained by social distancing and cancellation of events which we normally target for fundraising. The effect of this is that, like very many charities, we expect to have

a deficit budget in 2021-2. We have taken action to reduce costs to minimise this, and fortunately we have sufficient reserves to cover the projected deficit. However, this is not an ideal situation, and we continue to seek grants and sponsorship to help overcome this deficit.

What about the future?

We have been planning how we can share our heritage with a younger and more diverse audience, and improve the railway's impact on the environment. Now that the constraints of the pandemic have eased, we are able to action those plans, most of which will come into place for the 2022 season. They include:

- Sharing our heritage items more widely by providing free-access short videos to everybody
- Educating visitors on the railway development and its impact on local communities, through displays and events
- With the WSRHT, preparing and providing educational materials as a resource for local primary school teachers
- Working with our local communities, to showcase how the railway influenced their development
- Widening our reach by preparing materials and events for more diverse people..
- Eliminating single use plastic
- Eliminating waste to landfill
- Promoting of cycling and walking to access the railway, and to enable the railway to better serve cyclists and walkers
- A early stage project to power a heritage vehicle without the use of fossil fuels



(Don Bishop)

Our Projects

Jacquie Green

Preserve & Protect Fund

The West Somerset Railway has several historically significant coaches. Over the years, these have been preserved by skilled work carried out on the railway by volunteers and specialists, at considerable cost. Our “Preserve & Protect” restricted fund seeks donations towards the cost of carrying on this work, and importantly, to build a shelter for the completed vehicles, to maintain them away from the deteriorating effects of weather. Over the last 12 months we have invested over £15,000 in repainting, waterproofing and generally refurbishing the coaching stock, which now looks in great condition.

We are now turning our attention to providing the coaches with protection away from the deteriorating effects of weather. Our immediate plans are to erect a shelter for 2 historic coaches at Bishops Lydeard station. As well as preserving the carriages, it will allow them to be displayed to our visitors, at the main gateway to our railway, and enable them to be used on special trains.

Detailed plans are currently being drawn up for this shelter, which will be attached to the platform canopy of the station, to maintain the integrity of the station. This project will use existing cast iron pillars to support a building in keeping with the station buildings and be partly built by volunteers.

Details of the coaches to be preserved:

Coach 6705.

This has an interesting history. Built at Swindon in 1938 when Charles Collett was CME, it is a brake composite coach, having first- and third-class compartments and a brake van. It ran on the West of England and South Wales main lines until replaced by Mark One BR coaches, and then on local services until withdrawn in 1967. It was then given a general overhaul at Swindon Works and sent to a railway museum in Vermont, New England, along with the M7 tank engine, now on the Swanage Railway. It provided train

rides for a while and so was fitted with buckeye couplings and air brakes compatible with American locomotives. Sadly, the museum owner was killed in a plane crash and 6705 eventually found its way to Scranton, Pennsylvania, where it was kept in the national historical site, Steamtown, set up in the former Erie Lackawanna Railroad's workshops. It deteriorated badly here where it was kept on an open siding, but was rescued from there in 2007, and Robin White arranged movement by road to Halifax, Nova Scotia and then by ship (with nine class 66 locomotives from General Motors ordered by Freightliner) to Newport Docks. From there it went to Crewe where the body was repaired before being sent to the WSR in 2010 where the chassis and running gear were overhauled and internal fittings restored by Trust volunteers with staff from Williton Restorations. The work was completed at the end of 2019, but the coach has not yet been returned to traffic because of Covid. It is intended to use it either attached to the rear of a service train or as a 'heritage' train with the Hawksworth saloon for special events or private parties.

In the open, it suffers from weather, particularly from the sun's ultraviolet light which damages paintwork and upholstery, and the risk of water ingress in a westerly gale. In its present location at Williton, it also suffers from high levels of airborne dust and dirt from the adjacent council amenity site and damage from seagull excrement which has lifted paint and number transfers. Protection from the weather at Bishops Lydeard would also allow it to be viewed as a static exhibit by Museum visitors, when not actually in passenger service.

Right are recent pictures of the interior and exterior of the coach.



(WSRA)



(WSRA)

Hawksworth Inspection Saloon W80976W

One of 7 built in 1948 to the design of Frederick Hawksworth who was the last Chief Mechanical Engineer of the Great Western Railway. It was allocated to the Taunton District Engineer for track inspection, and used until the late 1960's, when it was installed with computers and carried out surveys all over the country. It was restored and purchased by the WSRA.

This coach has been very popular for birthday parties, anniversaries etc, as the kitchen facilities allow the service of food and drink, while passengers enjoy an unrivalled view of the longest full-size preserved railway in the UK.

Now in need of further work on upholstery and fittings, it will benefit from storage away from the deteriorating effects of weather, as well as being available for visits and use.



(WSRA)



(WSRA)

Rail Renewal Fund

The West Somerset Railway track uses 53,000 sleepers and well over 40 miles of rail. The rail has a life of between 50 and 100 years. Much of our track is at the very end of its life and we urgently need to renew it. This is very costly, particularly if bullhead rail is to be used.

Bullhead rail was the standard for the British railway system from the mid-19th until the mid-20th century. One of the first British Standards, BS 9, was for bullhead rail - it was originally published in 1905 and revised in 1924. Bullhead rail is similar to double-headed rail except that the profile of the head of the rail is not the same as that of the foot. Therefore, because the rail no longer had the originally perceived benefit of reusability, it was a very expensive method of laying track. Heavy cast iron chairs are needed to support the rail, which is secured in the chairs by wedges or "keys" which require regular attention. Bullhead rail has now been almost completely replaced by flat-bottom rail on British railways, although it survives on the national rail system in some sidings or branch lines.

As a Heritage Railway, the West Somerset Railway would like to keep Bullhead rail in the station surrounds and other areas where it can be seen and understood. The unseen parts of the railway will use the



more cost-effective flat-bottomed rail, like that used on the mainline.

To keep costs to a minimum, the work is undertaken by the staff & volunteers of the railway, supervised by volunteer professional engineers. The WSRA seeks funding for the considerable cost of materials. Some examples of this cost are:

£3,000 buys a full 60ft panel of bullhead track including all fittings (50 years life)

£1,800 buys a full 60ft panel of flat bottom track including all fittings (100 years life)

£840 buys a length of bullhead rail

£560 buys a length of flat bottom rail

£52 buys a durable wooden sleeper with serviceable chairs and keys

£28 buys a concrete sleeper with new fittings

During 2019-2020 the WSRA spent £140,792 on materials, which were used in 4 major projects along the line. Progress was held up in 20-21 because of Covid and because of a joint project with Somerset County Council to replace the level crossing at Minehead. For the winter 2021-2 we are planning major works at Blue Anchor, which will involve relaying track at both ends of the station. This work has great heritage significance, as the points to the west of Blue Anchor, with their fouling bar lock, are unique in the UK, to the best of our knowledge.



WSR Infrastructure Dept

Restoration of Small Prairie 4561

We have seen steady progress on this important project, with some delays, but some welcome good news.

The COVID pandemic and lock-down has affected the restoration work with both staff and volunteers staying away for the majority of 2020. Towards the end of the year staff returned and work on the restoration continued albeit at a much slower pace due to the absence of volunteers. The volunteers began returning in 2021 and it is hoped that work on the restoration will soon be back on track. Work continues the chassis of the locomotive.

Part of the axlebox refurbishing process is the removal and re-metalling of the white metal wheel bearing surfaces. Care is taken to recover the white metal as it can be used again if not too contaminated or sold to a scrap merchant as it is relatively valuable. The axlebox faces will then be re-metalled and machined to fit the axles once new bearing bronzes have been fitted.

Originally it had been thought that the main driving axle was too worn and would need replacing, requiring a special order of forged steel from overseas, followed by machining and then further specialised fitting work. However, volunteers engaged in tidying up old engineering paperwork uncovered a unique document from 1959 laying out acceptable tolerances for axles on a range of GWR locomotives including the 45XX series. This document has been inspected by the WSR Head of Mechanical Engineering and by the WSR PLC Director with responsibility for Mechanical Engineering, who are both agreed that it is genuine and can be used. Therefore a new axle is not required and the current axle and wheels have been sent away for specialised journal turning and polishing.

The six cylinder cocks were found to be in poor condition and needed replacing. At £400 each, it was pleasing that donors came forward to fund the majority of this unexpected expenditure.

Work on the locomotive is progressing and we are on target to achieve a rolling chassis by the end of the 2021/2022 financial year at which point attention will turn to the boiler. This means that we are now not too far away from the day that the locomotive will once again be able to steam again, for the first time since 1989.

For more information and updated progress see <https://wsra.org.uk/4561-blog/> <https://www.wsra.org.uk/locomotive-restoration>

Volunteering & Community Engagement

A heritage railway requires many people to operate it. The West Somerset, with its 23 miles of track and 9 stations, operating 7 days a week in the peak season, is particularly labour intensive. A very wide range of skills are needed. Many of those are technical: mechanical, electrical and civil engineering skills are needed to provide suitable infrastructure and working trains & equipment. Loco crew, guards and signalmen are needed to operate the trains. But there are very many more: our visitors need people on stations and trains to help and keep them safe, as well as others to provide catering and retail services. To offer an attractive environment needs maintenance and gardening... there are many more. We have a nucleus of expert, paid staff to lead and manage the operation, but it would be quite impossible to raise enough revenue from visitors to pay all the people needed.

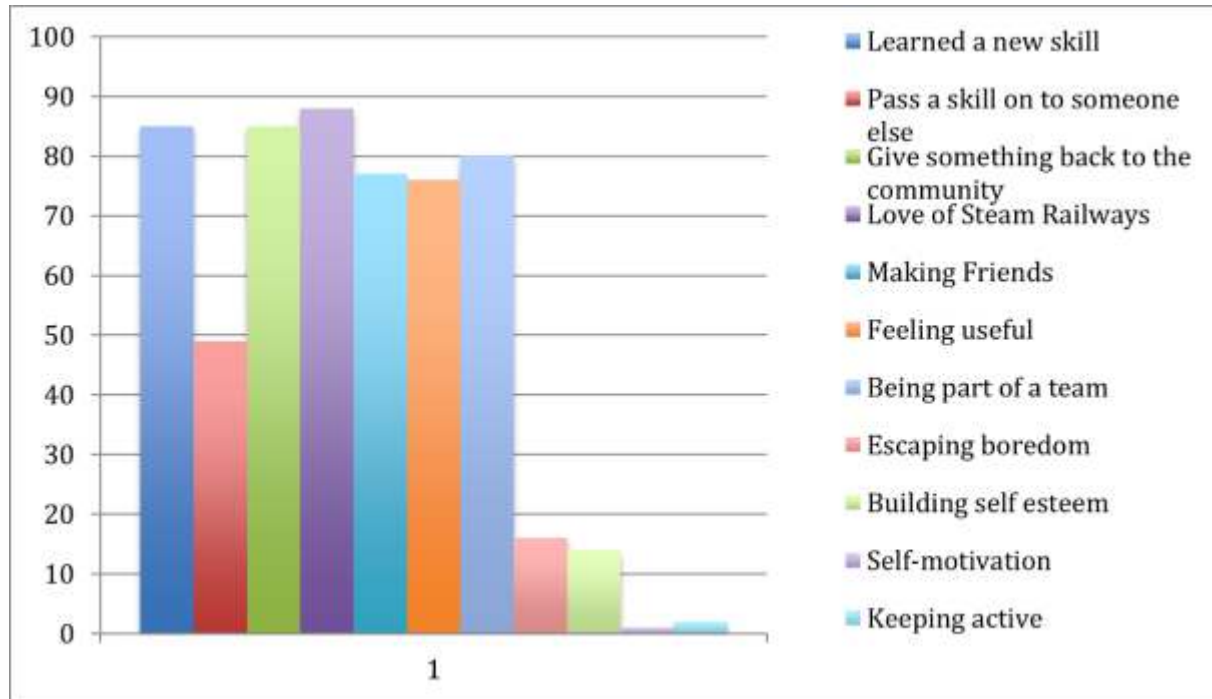
The West Somerset Railway is very fortunate to have some 1100 volunteers who give time to supporting the railway in almost every role. Some bring the skills they learned during previous employment, but many have learnt new skills through training, from older colleagues or by being part of a team. Clearly, these volunteers bring enormous benefit to the railway, but there are also clear benefits to the individuals themselves, evidenced by research both nationally and locally.



Ticket printing by volunteers at Dunster

Volunteer Information

We recently surveyed a random selection of our volunteers to help us understand their motives for volunteering, and the benefits they received. The results are set out below



How volunteering gave me and my family a new interest

Val Jones, WSRA café volunteer and Steam Rally office volunteer

I started volunteering for the WSRA in 2010. I had just retired as a nurse, and with my family grown up, I was looking for a new interest. My husband, Brian, had also retired, and he was also keen for something new.

We were attracted to the railway because we had taken our children on train trips, and to Santa specials, and always enjoyed them. So, when I saw that there was a volunteer recruitment event coming up, we both went.

I had no idea of what I wanted to do, but we were soon persuaded to make a start: I joined the café, while Brian did practical things for the Rally. Soon, Brian persuaded me to join the Rally team, and I persuaded him to volunteer in the shop.

What I love about volunteering is meeting new people who come to enjoy their day on the railway and helping them get the best out of it. I have made lots of friends among the people I work with, and learned some new skills: and my math's has improved enormously.

I enjoy it so much that I have persuaded lots of people to come along and help: my family, my former boss, my neighbours & my friends: even those who are working like to come and help at the Rally every August.



**Diana Ricketts-Tanner – retired Costs Lawyer/Law Costs Draftsman
– part-time legal administration consultant.**

Having joined the WSRA in 2009/2010 I supported my late husband in his volunteering on the West Somerset Railway. He was passionate about this and it was the major factor in our moving to West Somerset in 2009. He really loved the historical re-enactment elements of his role on a heritage railway.

Following his death in 2017 I felt really looked after and welcomed by his friends and colleagues at Williton Station. Our dog Cid and I were frequent visitors to the station and I began to rekindle the interest in the railway I had previously enjoyed. Following some discussion with the station team generally I had a long talk with the Station Master about volunteering possibilities. It was complicated as I have some health issues which meant certain roles were impractical for me to consider, but eventually I began volunteering in the booking office. This really helped me recover my self-confidence and self-esteem. My colleagues were so considerate and thoughtful. The sense of belonging and being part of something bigger than myself was tangible.

The railway brings so much pleasure and enjoyment to its passengers, visitors, and volunteers. It is an important part of the community in so many ways. I ventured to the WSRA AGM in 2019 and was thereafter asked if I might consider being co-opted as a Trustee. This was another means of volunteering for the railway and after some consideration I agreed. I have learnt so much from both of my volunteering roles. Not just about the railway, its operation, management and working but also about myself. I have met new friends and developed new interests.



Heritage Engineering Skills

The WSRA supports Heritage Engineering Skills via the West Somerset Restoration Facility on the railway at Williton. This is where much of the long-term restoring work for the railway is carried out, on both carriages and locomotives. The team working there is a mixture of paid staff and volunteers, with older, experienced engineers and craftsmen passing on their skills and knowledge to the next generation. The facility is managed by the West Somerset Railway PLC, which allows it to supplement the restoration work commissioned by the charity with commercial restoration work for other heritage railways & enthusiasts: but the work we commission is always the priority.

The ethos of this facility has always been ensuring that heritage engineering skills are passed from one generation to another, so they can be kept alive. All West Somerset Restoration paid staff started out as apprentices and learned their trade via local colleges and on the job training and mentoring.

The Engineering Foreman, Ryan Pope, started with the railway in 2010 achieving first a level 2 Engineering Apprenticeship and then going on to achieve an Advanced Level Apprenticeship in



(Mike Johns)

Engineering Manufacture. He graduated and became a full-time employee in 2015 and since then has shown great dedication and skill in everything he does. Ryan has purchased and restored his own small locomotive, which he now hires out to Heritage Railways, gaining business management skills along the way as he plans for sufficient income to support the next overhaul when it becomes due. In January 2018 Ryan was appointed as Engineering Foreman and has gone from strength to strength in that role.

Apprenticeship is not the end of training for the engineering staff – it is the first step on a planned journey that imparts skills and confidence to the next generation. They continue to work with experienced engineers and craftsmen as well as undertaking appropriate external courses and qualifications.



(Martyn Snell)

Supporting the West Somerset Economy

We operate in West Somerset District, an area that has considerable economic challenges. In 2015, West Somerset offered only 5.5% of the total number of jobs available in Somerset at 12,400, compared with 66,700 in South Somerset. (Somerset County Council Economic Factsheet 2017).

The largest town, Minehead, which is the destination of most people who visit the West Somerset Railway, has a population of 12,000 (2011 census). Its population is considerably older than the rest of Somerset (30% over 65, compared with 21% for Somerset and 16% nationally). Retaining young people in the town is seen as a critical challenge, as is in-work poverty, with wage levels low. Tourism is the main economic driver, with 55% of jobs related to this activity, directly or indirectly. (Minehead Economic Plan 2016).

The West Somerset Railway is an important part of the offer to visitors, drawing 200,000 visitors annually. It is rated by Trip Advisor as the No 1 activity for local visitors, rated 4.5/5 by over 2300 reviewers, who emphasised the nostalgic, heritage experience, and the friendliness of volunteers. The Association's work supports these two elements of the railway, helping to develop this key local economic driver. Our partner operating company, West Somerset Railway PLC, is already one of the major employers in West



Somerset, with about 45 people employed in managerial, administrative, marketing, engineering & various specialist fields, supported by the volunteers, who carry out most of the daily work of operating the railway and welcoming the visitors.

West Somerset is the lowest ranking district in the whole country in the Social Mobility Index (January 2016), a measure that compares the chances that a child from a disadvantaged background will do well at school and get a good job. (Department for Education social mobility report 2016).

We believe that the Association has a part to play in improving social mobility, through engaging young people with the railway, where they can learn heritage skills from staff and experienced volunteers. This can allow them to develop their interest into a career, either through the volunteering route, or through engineering apprenticeships, which we have been able to offer in our Restorations workshop. There are some examples here. These successes have convinced us that we can develop more pathways to help other young (and not so young) people in the future.

Phil Sizer

I first started volunteering as a Tracker aged 13. At this time, I still lived near Reading and would stay with my grandparents in Blue Anchor at weekends and during school holidays to work as a Travelling Ticket Inspector, a buffet car steward and with the model railway department. I was quite badly bullied at my school and volunteering gave me an escape from my world in Reading, helped me with my confidence, and allowed me to develop life skills, like dealing with the public and handling cash. I moved to Blue Anchor with my family when I was 15 and continued volunteering throughout my teens.

I left the railway when I was 18 to go to university to study television production in 2008. After graduating, I moved back home to Blue Anchor and worked in retail in Minehead. After a couple of years of work, I realised that I really missed volunteering on the WSR, so I went along to the volunteer recruitment day in 2015. I thought I could go back to being a TTI and then train to be a guard, but I decided to push myself and learn something different. I decided I would like to learn about signalling as it was something I knew little about. I enrolled as a trainee signalman at Blue Anchor and I very soon discovered how much I loved it. Quite quickly I decided that this was what I wanted to do for my career. That's when I started applying for paid roles at signal boxes around the country.

I passed out as a Blue Anchor signalman in the autumn of 2016 and passed out for Minehead a year later in 2017. At the time, being Minehead signalman also involved acting as the duty controller for the day, so I gained a lot of new skills from this too.

In 2017, I saw a job come up on the WSR's Permanent Way gang and applied, leaving retail to work on the railway full time. Whilst doing this role I got a much better appreciation and understanding of the railway and how it is maintained. I continued to volunteer as a signaller and in the peak operating season of 2019 I was seconded to work in the Operations Department to provide cover and responsible officer duties. All during this time I was still applying to Network Rail to become a signaller and finally in the summer of 2020, my dream became a reality, and I was offered a job to become a signaller at Crediton in Devon.

Within 6 weeks of starting this role, I was off to signalling school in Newport and after 11 weeks of hard work, I completed my Initial Signalling Training. I then shadowed signallers at Crediton to complete my in-box training. By Christmas, I had passed out as a signaller at Crediton. I have now been there for over 10 months, and I have loved every minute - I feel so fortunate to be doing a job I absolutely love.

I would never have been able to achieve this dream if it had not been for the volunteering opportunities that the WSR had offered me. Being a Tracker set me up for the world of work and gave me an escape as a teenager, and then coming back as volunteer as an adult helped me realise what I wanted from my life and got me to where I wanted to be. I still continue to be an active volunteer, signalling at Blue Anchor and Minehead whenever I can, and I can't see myself ever stopping because it is just too enjoyable!



Accounts

West Somerset Railway Association

Consolidated statement of financial activities (incorporating an income and expenditure account)

For the year ended 31 March 2021

		Restricted	Unrestricted	31-Mar-21 12 months	31-Mar-20 15 months
	Note	£	£	£	£
Income from:					
Donations and legacies	3	126,855	192,222	319,078	513,571
Other trading activities	4	-	53,353	53,353	502,974
Investment income		-	114	114	448
Total Income		<u>126,855</u>	<u>245,690</u>	<u>372,545</u>	<u>1,016,993</u>
Expenditure on:					
Raising funds		-	(1,134)	(1,134)	429,941
Charitable activities		65,580	248,737	314,317	558,936
Total Expenditure	6	<u>65,580</u>	<u>247,603</u>	<u>313,183</u>	<u>988,877</u>
Net movement in funds	9	<u>61,276</u>	<u>(1,913)</u>	<u>59,363</u>	<u>28,116</u>
Reconciliation of funds:					
Total funds brought forward		<u>155,931</u>	<u>1,620,135</u>	<u>1,776,066</u>	<u>1,747,950</u>
Total funds carried forward		<u>217,206</u>	<u>1,618,222</u>	<u>1,835,428</u>	<u>1,776,066</u>

There were no other recognised gains or losses other than those stated above. Movements in funds are disclosed in note 21 to the accounts.

Thank You to all our Supporters

The WSRA would like to say a huge thank you to everyone who has contributed to the charity over the last 12 months – we simply would not have been able to achieve so much without your continued support.

The funds we have received have allowed us to make a substantial impact on the refurbishment of the Small Prairie, 4561 and on the Taunton Saloon which also won a Restoration Award from the Transport Trust. We received valuable funding to help pay for vital equipment for the WSRA TV project which was launched during the lockdowns to help combat isolation and loneliness.

In conjunction with this, we successfully received funding for a new toilet block at the Restorations workshops in Williton, for volunteer training and to cover some of our core costs. This was particularly welcome due to the loss of funding through the annual rally being cancelled for two years in a row.

The Association would also like to extend their gratitude to the many trusts, foundations and corporations that have offered us support. These include grants from:

The National Lottery - Awards for All

Foyle Foundation

The Transport Trust

Peter and Teresa Harris Charitable Trust

Clark Foundation

Co-op Community Fund

Somerset Community Foundation

Skipton Building Society Foundation

Elmgrant Trust

Aviva Community Fund

Calor Rural Community Fund

Card Factory

Aurelius Charitable Trust

Julia and Hans Rausing Trust

Medlock Charitable Foundation

Prudential

Hilary Awdry Charitable Trust

29th May 1961 Trust

Verina Black Charitable Trust

Veronica Awdry Charitable Trust

SPARKS

Meet our staff & trustees

Trustees

Mike Sherwood; Chairman

A long career in Operations and Project management working internationally for several medical device companies followed by a spell of interim and contract management before retiring to follow a life-long passion for preserved steam.

Geoff Garfield; Vice-Chairman

A retired pharmacist, with extensive managerial experience in large multiple businesses and the NHS, and as a management consultant and senior team coach. Now volunteers as a railway signalman and chairs the organising committee of the annual steam rally

John Glover

An active railway supporter for some 35 years, with extensive experience of railway operations. Currently employed by the West Somerset Railway in the operations department

Mike Lea; Treasurer

A chartered accountant for some 32 years, most recently as senior partner of Smith & Williamson in Bristol. Vastly experienced in charity finance matters and trustee of 10 other charities in the South West

Barrie Childs

An active supporter of all the WSR organisations for several years. A previous WSRA Trustee, with a background in computer programming and small business, now close to retirement with more time to devote to the WSRA.

Jeff Price

Involved with heritage steam locomotive operation and overhaul for over 30 years and a WSR volunteer in the loco department for over 20 years. Director of a small engineering company using traditional process whilst also embracing modern solutions.

Diana Ricketts-Tanner

A member of the WSRA for over 10 years, and subsequently

a volunteer on Williton Station. Diana has a keen sense of community and personal experience of the mental and physical health and well-being benefits of active volunteering. She is a part-time legal administration consultant.

Shirley Turner

Part of the support crew for locomotive 6024 King Edward 1 and also their education officer and social media promoter. A volunteer at Stogumber station with a good working knowledge of the West Somerset Railway and enjoys sharing her passion for railways with people from all walks of life.

Denise Parker

An active WSR supporter for almost 20 years, currently employed by the West Somerset Railway in on-train catering supervision and management. An 'people person' with various roles in the local community including that of scout leader.

Staff

Jacquie Green jacquie.green@wsra.org.uk
General Manager

Keith Sandford keith.sandford@wsra.org.uk
Membership administrator

Kathryn Sims
Bookkeeper

kathryn.sims@wsra.org.uk

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West Somerset Railway Association

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