

# Lynton and Barnstaple Railway Trust (and associated organisations)

## Members' Day 11 November 2023

Notes by member Rob Prosser

### Introduction

The meeting opened at 1130. *Peter Miles* (Chair, L&B Trust) welcomed the attendees and explained that there was a full programme to work through, but that there would be space for questions.

*Tim* and *Barrie* spoke about some of the people that the Trust has lost recently:

- Tony Cross was a well-loved volunteer with 20 years of service as a diesel driver and a familiar face behind the shop counter.
- Chris Shields passed away in October, a few weeks after his last visit to Woody Bay, where he was a regular paintshop volunteer for the last 4 or 5 years. A memorial will be held for Chris on Thursday 16th November 2023 from 11.00am at Moorhayes Community Centre , Tiverton.

Both will be sorely missed.

### CIC Update

*Malcolm Smith* provided an update on events at the CIC over the last year, and plans for next year.

- Health and Safety
  - There has been a focus on working at height, in line with the ORR's emphasis on this topic following some accidents on other railways.
  - Working at height training was delivered with competence recorded via HOPS.
  - A ladder survey and replacement programme was carried out, with several unsuitable ladders condemned and disposed of. The railway now has a good understanding of the equipment that it owns.
  - The pit railing and grating has been significantly improved, including extra rails to prevent falls from the footplate into the pit.
  - The shed floor has been improved, and the shed cleaned and tidied.
- Station Building
  - Some damp issues have been resolved, including replacement of rotten timbers
  - The shop and offices have been redecorated
  - Upgrades to the wiring and alarms have been carried out to bring the fire alarm system up to code.
- Track and Lineside
  - Fencing has been repaired
  - Training on the new tamper has been delivered
  - Drains and Culverts have received attention
- Signalling
  - The Down Starter has been repaired, including new timber and replacement of the finial.
  - All the ground frames have been re-painted
- Station Site
  - 10 benches have been repaired and re-painted

- The woodland walk has been transformed
- Many new signs are in place
- Another green house has been added.
- Lyn
  - The steam brake combination valve has received attention
  - Problems with the ejector plumbing have been resolved.
- Heddon Hall
  - Work has been carried out on the water pump and air compressor
  - Sir George
  - Work is underway – this will be briefed later
- Box Van
  - The box van has been collected from Dave Moore’s railway and re-painted. It will be in service soon.
- Passenger numbers
  - Passenger numbers are up 12% from 2022 (April to October)
  - 4000 more people
  - “Local Sunday” saw 900 trips
- Revenue
  - 10% to 20% up on 2022
  - The tearoom had the largest increase (up 1/3) – They almost ran out of room at times.
  - Costs will be higher this year – invoices are still coming in.
  - There were lots of happy faces leaving the railway this year.
- Next Year
  - 100 new plastic sleepers
  - Tamping machine
  - Sir George will be in steam
  - Pilton will receive new sides
  - Coach 17 work
  - Webcams
  - Volunteer recruitment
  - Training
  - Driver experience
  - Miniature railway (we could do with someone to take this on)
  - More new signs
  - Work on Safety Management System
  - There will be one gala, but other events are being planned

Malcolm attended the HRA event last week. One of his main takeaways was about the Visitor Experience Concept – “More than just a train ride”. The visitor experience sits where timetable, interpretation, and theatre meet.

#### Chelfham Update

*Nigel Thompson* gave an update on progress at Chelfham, starting with urging members to come along to one of the Wednesday & Sunday open days if they hadn’t been recently.

This year, the Chelfham group have cleared the Up platform of sheds and the shipping container, moving the S&T equipment to a new location. All the remaining sheds are now out of sight. The

September gala was very successful with many visitors and donations. The group have also run some tours for groups.

They have recently got the viaduct gates changed, thanks to the work of Chris Duffell and the obtaining of the lease agreement. Working volunteers now have access to the viaduct and have been working hard to fell and clear timber to open up the trackbed. The eventual aim is to get this opened for visitors. The focus at present is keeping the site clean and tidy, plus building a new work shed on land donated by the Distant Point partnership to provide a working space for restoration. The group will also be able to take card payments next year as they now have WIFI.

Charles Summers explained that, contrary to the story in the last magazine, the land for the shed was donated by the Distant Point partnership rather than being sold to the railway.

Nigel continued that every visitor that turns up has loved Chelfham station, but almost invariably ask about plans for to laying track. The group have therefore started an appeal and are working out costs to lay some track.

*Dave Stockwell* requested that the Trust give their full support to the Chelfham group as some feel that they have been forgotten, and there is so much more that the group can do. Every bit of track laid strengthens the case for the railway, and laying track at Chelfham would make a real statement.

Plastic sleepers are £110 each, and they would need 500+. The group would really like to see a rising total for their appeal with every magazine. Dave asked for a show of hands on who would support laying track and a significant majority of attendees supported this.

#### CIC Update (reprise)

*Malcolm Smith* returned to the microphone to talk about two other key events – the arrival of two new staff members. James has joined the engineering staff from the South Devon Railway, and has really moved things along at an amazing pace. Rebecca has joined the staff from the West Somerset railway to help free up resources for the management of the Old Station House Inn. She has lots of experience of marketing and will be pushing the driver experience packages as part of her role.

*Mike Whiteaker* asked about how the railway was caring for the coaches, considering the attention needed on Coach 17, and noting that maintaining the coaches will be an increasing issue if they are kept outside. What are the railway's plans to manage this?

*Peter Miles* stated that outline drawings have been produced for a protective structure over the headshunt, a quote has been received, and a planning request would be submitted in the next months. This would be a temporary structure.

*Chris Lane* asked about signage, pointing out that we need to keep these consistent – e.g. we need to use the same font. *Peter Miles* explained that this was the plan, and that the signs at OSHI have already been replaced with signs to the new pattern. *Chris Duffell* suggested that the fonts were different – *Peter Miles* said that the intent was to retain consistency and that he thought they were the same.

*Dave Stockwell* asked if Peter would be providing an update on the Cricket Field Lane extension. *Peter* confirmed that this would be covered later in the meeting.

#### Old Station House Inn Update

*Mark Halliday* (General Manager, OSHI) updated the meeting about progress with the Old Station House Inn. After 6 months (since 17<sup>th</sup> April), the top line figures were c. £563k of turnover, comprising 61% dry sales, and 39% wet (i.e. drinks). They have sold over 9000 pints of Carling.

It has been a good but challenging summer, with some weeks of heavy rain. Some investments have already been made, including new signage, new kitchen equipment, and new cellar cooling equipment to better care for the beer. These are one-off expenses. They don't want to make any structural alterations until the details of the railway's plans for Blackmoor are clearer.

The response to the pub has been very positive. The pub is led by both locals and tourists (in the summer). Mark and the team will keep this up, making it very clear to the locals that they are still wanted and welcome.

Staffing has been challenging over the summer, in common with the wider hospitality industry, but they have worked through it. They have regularly had 10 staff on duty some days in the summer (5 bar, 5 kitchen, split across shifts). They have had 3 chefs over the summer and have taken on a trainee ready for next summer. Winter will be easier due to lower staff needs.

The pub has been running regular promotions – a kids meal deal has seen 500+ servings, in response to banners and online advertising. Winter deals are proving very popular. 200+ Christmas meals are already booked. The pub has 4 regular skittles teams, and a series of Young Farmers Club events booked into next year.

Winter projects include upgrades to the toilets.

A member asked about "gossip" that there would be a shareholders or members' representative on the board. How many directors are there?

*Peter Miles* stated there were 6, namely Peter Miles, Ian Cowling, Malcolm Smith, Jon Payne, Michael Grimoldby and Mike Pearce

*Rob Prosser* pointed out that it had been hard to find a parking space each evening of the gala weekend – this is amazing to see at a country pub. Are there any plans to provide extra parking using the Trust's land opposite the pub? *Peter Miles* stated that there is a plan to build a new car park but details are TBC. A car park on the land opposite could require an underpass for safety.

*Rob Prosser* asked if there was a plan to sell local craft products etc, either at the pub or at Woody Bay. The shop at Parracombe stocks this sort of item and it would be a good way to reinforce the link with the local community. *Mark Halliday* explained that they do plan to sell railway souvenirs and local crafts (alongside the stock of household goods that they keep to help the local community). They are looking at local producers of craft items, and talking to the Lynton Craft Centre.

*Peter Vaughan* (L&B member and Lynton resident) pointed out the excellent PR opportunities of the pub's hosting of (and donating to?) a fundraiser for the Parracombe Playground appeal. *Mark Halliday* confirmed that this message has gone out in the Parracombe School newsletter, including a clear reference to the pub's links to the L&B Railway.

*Malcolm Smith* announced a plan to host an event for regular volunteers at the pub in January – Details are TBC.

Cricket Field Lane Update – John Barton

*John Barton* provided an update on the Cricket Field Lane (CFL) extension project, starting with a quick poll on how many members got their news updates from the website vs waiting for the magazine. The vast majority of attendees confirmed that they get their updates from the website.

*John* explained that he would be able to provide a more detailed update in a month or so as things were progressing with the plans. The Trust started the pre-application process in April and received a reply from Exmoor National Park Authority (ENPA) in August. Since then the Trust have been working with a planning advisor to focus on responding to ENPA. Details of this process are confidential.

Any planning application needs to demonstrate that it is not dependent on any other projects to avoid “salami slicing” of projects in an attempt to avoid planning requirements for environmental impact assessments etc by passing a larger project off as a set of smaller projects below the threshold. ENPA have accepted that the CFL extension meets this criterion, so we don’t need to re-do the full environmental impact assessment for the whole railway to Blackmoor (as the assessments done in 2018 are now out of date). This is a huge step and puts a block on technical challenges of objectors.

*Clive Robey* (Operations Director and Parracombe resident) asked if *John* had received and responded to the recent letter from Parracombe Parish Council asking for better communication from the Trust. *John* confirmed that he had responded straight away, promising to speak to the council as soon as the Trust had more detail on their plans.

*John* explained that we need to update some documents to reflect the focus on Cricket Field Lane. As for any application, we need:

- Topographical Surveys and Application Boundary plans (we have these from the previous application)
- Plans and sections of proposed development (we have most of those from the previous submission but we need a few more for the CFL proposals)
- Excavated material assessment (we have this from the previous application but we need to amend it to take account of the CFL plan) (We are excavating c. 7000m<sup>3</sup> of material and need to say what we are going to do with it)
- Planning and Access Statement
- Landscape & Visual Impact Assessment
- Tree survey
- Arboricultural method statement (if necessary)
- Heritage Assessment
- Habitat Survey
- Biodiversity Net Gain Calculation (need to deliver a 10% improvement in biodiversity)
- Ecological Impact Report
- Tourism Impact Assessment
- Noise and Vibration Assessment
- Carbon Neutral Plan (demonstrate how we will be carbon neutral by 2050 (and to achieve 50% by 2030))

Two key issues need to be resolved:

- Passenger management at Cricket Field Lane, e.g. access to footpaths. We are clarifying the ownership of Cricket Field Lane. As an alternative, we own the land to Parracombe halt site so people could walk along the trackbed.

- What will the layout at CFL be? The newsletter said it would be a flat area in the cutting. This is still an option, but John is exploring an option to partially use the triangle at CFL and site the loop on a slight curve. He is working on the details to present to the board.

*Andy Richards* pointed out that the site would need to have a gradient of less than 1:100 for the loop. *John* advised that the ORR recommendation is no more than 1:500, but pointed out that *Beddgelert* is on 1:45 and the WHR run round trains there. One scheme would level the trackbed to 1:500. This would make future extensions more complicated, but this planning application is ONLY to build to CFL. The fill would be re-excavated for any future extension.

*Andy Richards* asked if there is actually money to get to anything after buying the pub, and if there isn't what is the point? *John* pointed out that millions of pounds would be needed to get to *Wistlandpound*, £30M to get from *Wistlandpound* to *Pilton*, and £10M to get from *Woody Bay* to *Lynton*. Are we wasting our time? He doesn't think so. *Andy* pointed out that they had built the first mile very cheaply, and expressed his disbelief that, after 20 years, we hadn't gone anywhere.

*Peter Vaughan* expressed his support for doing the extension in bite sized chunks and that he was fully in favour of the proposal. *John* confirmed that not doing it in bite sized chunks would need an environmental assessment for the whole route.

*Rob Prosser* pointed out that we had tried to get to *Blackmoor* but the planning said no, and we didn't have the money, so the proposal absolutely makes sense. *Rob* asked if there is a risk that we could cause CFL to become a popular footpath, giving ourselves a headache going forward if we end up with a level crossing on a tight curve on a steep gradient. *Peter Vaughan* asked if people might be able to claim adverse possession. *John Barton* confirmed that this is on the list of risks, but that footpath crossings will be manageable.

*Andy Hurn* questioned the time constraints of the agreement for *Killington Lane bridge* (as briefed by *John* at the AGM). What are the timescales for the CFL extension and will it align with the timings for *Killington Lane bridge*? *John Barton* confirmed that, if we keep moving as we are, this won't be a problem. We have 3 years from January 23 to start the work as the council's technical approval of the design will expire in Jan 26. Once we have planning and can put a contract together the council will sign the agreement. He has had an email from council this week asking about our plans, and has responded to update them on the situation.

Applying for planning permission to build the bridge by itself would not pass the "independence of other projects" test so would require the full set of environmental impact assessments – this would be seen as salami slicing, so it is not an option.

*Dave Stockwell* asked if funds are in place for the extension, and raised concerns that, after 18 years of a 5 ½ mile dream, people may be reluctant to contribute. *Peter Miles* stated that the appeal to extend to *Parracombe* wasn't open for long but was successful. The appeal was paused when it became clear that Section 73 wasn't going to succeed. We haven't completed the appeal for funds - we still have funds coming in and we will get more when it re-opens. We have plenty of support, and the new planning application will wake it up.

## LUNCH

### Rebuilding Sir George

*Malcolm Smith* provided an update on the rebuilding of Sir George (formally Charles Wytock). Malcolm, who spent lockdown, along with Anne Belsey, removing green paint from the loco, showed the meeting a slideshow of the work in progress.

The motion is almost done. Piston rings have arrived and need gapping and fitting. The boiler is done, and cladding fitted. The cab is fitted. Some modifications have been made, including a sun roof and replacement firebox door mechanism. The cab and tanks have now been removed again to paint the boiler.

*Anne Belsey* (Chair of the Bagnall 2819 Company) explained that the name had been changed from Charles Wytock to Sir George Newnes, partly because of a spelling error on the original plates, but mostly because of Sir George's link to the L&B and the local area.

Anne's job (apart from removing paint) is to find the money for the project. To this end, she had an ample supply of share application forms. They have raised c.£100k to date and expect to need a further £30k. Anne can provide the application forms on request. The minimum shareholding is £1000, at £1000 per share. Anne explained that they had adopted the shareholder model as the company is not a charity and therefore would need to treat any donations as income, with a potential corporation tax burden.

#### 762 Club Update

*Peter Miles* provided an update on the activities of the 762 club. They are building two (eventually four) new Manning Wardle locomotives. They plan to build Yeo in early SR Green (which is very close to late L&B green). They will make some modifications to the cab front to overcome historic problems with smoke retention (as on the originals).

To date:

- 4 cylinders have been cast and machined. These are a further development of Lyd's cylinders with improvements to gas passages.
- Horn blocks have been cast
- 4 "Curved slotted bits" of the Joy valve gear have been cast
- Front frame stretchers and front boiler/tank support bearers have been cast
- Pony truck wheels and axles completed.
- Bronze blocks for valve gear have been CNC machined.

The project has experienced issues with foundries post COVID, mostly due to staff retention issues.

They are exploring options for cranks -forged cranks will be very costly. They are looking at CNC machined cranks from solid, which are widely used in Germany. Discussions with ORR are under way.

Frame design is almost done – They will be water jetted soon, at which point the loco will start to actually exist. One loco will be built at Boston Lodge, and one will be built in Derbyshire. Completion times will be offset to avoid both locos needing 10 year boiler exams & overhaul at the same time.

*Charles Summers* asked for an estimate of the delivery time. *Peter* stated 2 to 3 years.

#### General Q&A

*Peter Vaughan* thanked the Trustees for setting up the event, which has been very informative so far.

A member asked for an update on the Blackmoor Gate to Wistlandpound plan. *Peter Miles* stated that there are some land issues to resolve. This is something that they need to do, but there are no firm plans at present.

### Historic Artefacts

*Peter Miles*: The Trust collects and preserves artifacts associated with the L&B. A few things have come up recently:

- Some years ago the Trust bought some items from the estate of Andrew Dow, including many photographs of the L&B (and other railways). They have recently been contacted by Andrew's son offering other items, including more photographs and films, along with a few other odds and ends. The Trust is acquiring these for the Trust collection.
- Another station bench from an unknown L&B station.
- Barnstaple Town Signal Box. This will be re-erected at Blackmoor/ OSHI as a museum exhibit, probably including a set of signalling equipment. It will be re-located in a suitable position at Blackmoor in due course.

*Chris Lane* offered his thanks for getting this published on the website, but pointed out that there has been a lack of updates on the activities of the Thursday gang recently. Can someone take this on?

*Keith Morton* (S&T gang): A signal has been re-furbished for use at Blackmoor/OSHI for display purposes. It is an ex LSWR item, originally located at Kings Nympton. The team are speaking to Mark to agree how best to use it.

*Tim Woods* (S&T gang) appealed (on behalf of *Malcolm Kitchen*) for a Tyer tablet lock for possible use on the railway.

*Rob Prosser* asked if the Trust had a Collection Management System or other records of their collection of historic artefacts. *Stuart Nelhams* stated that HOPS has an asset register built in, and they plan to add historic assets to this.

*Tim Woods* reminded the meeting that the remembrance service would be held at WB at 11am on 12<sup>th</sup> November – please arrive by 1045 for the laying of the wreaths.

There will be a volunteer carol service at Woody Bay tea room on 14<sup>th</sup> December. This is in conjunction with Parracombe Church. Two years ago this was held at the church, but moved to the tearoom in 2022 due to ice and snow. This year the church requested to hold it at the tea room again. This is a great example of working with local community – there is a lot of support for the railway in the village. We also had 95 children from Parracombe, Kentisbury and Lynton schools (plus 30 adults) at the remembrance event on 10<sup>th</sup> November – again, this shows the level of local support.

*Clive Robey*: Some years ago we bought a ground frame from Network Rail through his contacts – this is now at Rowley Moor Farm. They are now working to acquire two other frames, including one from Tonbridge East, and one from Petersfield. The second is a 17 lever Stevens ground frame, which is currently enclosed, and may include circuit controllers and locks. They are exploring options to remove this and bring it to the farm. It is not known if we need to pay for this, but we are at the head of the queue.

*Charles Summers BEM* spoke about his British Empire Medal, which he considers an award for everyone who has worked on the carriages over the years.

The meeting closed at 1500.