



CHAIRMAN'S UPDATE – WEEK COMMENCING MONDAY 4th DECEMBER 2023

Another busy week has flown by. I am actually writing this whilst waiting to fly back from Spain where I have had a few days in the Canary Islands. It has been a nice sunny break, although I still managed to spend half the first day doing work (including Bluebell stuff).

There's been a lot going on this last week and the railway has been busy. The sheer effort everyone is putting into delivering our products continues to be amazing. This passion and drive is what 'makes' the Bluebell. From cleaning carriages, to shovelling out the pits, to stripping the varnish from a carriage, to doing track inspections in all weathers - and so much more. There is an awful lot of achievement to be proud of.

Monday

No trains running today – and I think everyone appreciated a little respite!

Tuesday

Again, no trains today, but lots going on in the background as ever... Catering ordering and preparing for the next five days; Sales & Marketing dealing with last minute bookings and changes; and everyone else keeping the place safe and maintained ready for tomorrow when we start all over again.

Wednesday

This week's operations commenced with a Golden Arrow lunch train, plus the evening SteamLights. All were well sold in terms of numbers and our visitors all seemed to enjoy the experience. We continue to receive really good feedback about the food and service on the Golden Arrow, so once again I say well done all of you who play a part in that.

Thursday

It was the first Thursday in ages I wasn't at the Railway. Instead, I was on a plane from Gatwick at 7am! Mrs C took me and one of my best mates to Gatwick for our annual 'boys' trip' abroad – I think Mrs C will enjoy the peace and quiet although she has still got the children and my mate's dog to look after!

At the railway there was a shunt at Sheffield Park and Horsted Keynes, plus we had another Golden Arrow lunch train and SteamLights in the evening. It was another busy day, and the loadings were all good once again.

Friday

No train service during the day, just SteamLights at 5pm followed by a Murder Mystery Golden Arrow. All trains were virtually full. The annual Christmas carol service took place at Horsted Keynes, which was well attended and with much hearty singing.



Saturday

Another busy and full-on day with Santas, SteamLights, Golden Arrows, carol singers and so much more. The weather was awful, but we had lots of happy visitors - specially the children.

Sunday

Well, the storm gave the main line a battering over the weekend, and we faced our own issues with rodents having eaten through the fibre-optic cable between Kingscote and East Grinstead – just what we didn't need. Anyway, we now know why we were having connection problems. That will be another task for the infrastructure team to deal with – as if they didn't have enough to be doing!

The day was again busy, and I am guessing some of you may already be feeling a bit 'Christmassed out!' Stay strong folks, we are nearly halfway through. Our visitors love what we are delivering for them, and we are also (I hope!) enjoying our hobby.

And finally...

Looking ahead to next year, there is much to be done and on many fronts. We need to continue to grow our offer so we may continue to attract increasing numbers. One of our biggest sources of income is catering - and on-board catering is becoming a bigger part of our overall offer. As some of our regular volunteers retire, we need to fill the gaps they leave. With the increased activity and the more we are doing, we need even more help. So, if you fancy manning the RMB, working in a supper train or serving cream teas - or know someone who does - then please get in touch with me.

Have a fantastic week everybody. I will hopefully see many of you through the week and over the weekend.

Paul Churchman
Chairman
11th December 2023