



CHAIRMAN'S UPDATE – WEEK COMMENCING SAT 13th MAY 2023

I am rather late sending this to you this week, simply because I had a very busy week last week and then I was away over the weekend.

Saturday

A lovely day, and the Railway was busy. We had the Circus Skills event at Kingscote, which seemed to be quite popular. I was the late turn signalman at Sheffield Park - a turn I love doing on summer evenings. Also, it is quiet - so I was able to fire-up the laptop and get some work done as well.

Sunday

Another busy day, with the Circus Skills event well attended at Kingscote. Circuses also represent something with a heritage background, and fit nicely into the family attraction theme. So this was actually quite a coherent 'match' with what we do at the Railway.

Monday

At last, a normal Monday and not a bank holiday! Just the usual behind the scenes stuff happening at the railway with all our many unsung heroes ensuring the cogs keep turning. I was in the office (this week was shaping-up to be a busy one and I wondered when I would see Mrs C).

Out for dinner this evening with Neil Glaskin and some colleagues from the bus industry. This group meets for dinner and a catch-up every few months. During the conversation, and just as somebody mentioned my weekly Bluebell update, his phone pinged, and the latest copy had at that moment been forwarded to him by 'someone who gets it from someone who gets it from someone else.' I didn't realise how sought-after my updates were becoming! This friend is a Bluebell member as well but does not volunteer.

Tuesday

I was in back-to-back meetings all day at work but was still managing to fit in Bluebell emails and even a phone call.

A fairly busy day with coach parties at the railway, which is always good to see as it sustains business at times when there may be few other passengers around.

In the evening I held a Teams meeting with the Heritage Railway Association. I sit on the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Committee and we have compiled a toolkit for the use of directors and senior leadership at heritage railways, to help them achieve an inclusive, fair and safe environment for everyone involved. I wrote the document, with the help and expertise of Mrs C.



Wednesday

Another day that seemed to be over far too quickly, but I did seem to achieve a lot.

The railway was again reasonably well attended by passengers and there was a lot of preparation going on for the upcoming Road meets Rail event at the weekend. My weekend was already committed to being away, so I knew I wouldn't be able to see it, but I also knew all the planning that had been put in by Liz Groome, Neil Glaskin, Lisa Boyle and everyone else involved would make the event very much a success. I was particularly excited we would be running freight trains – something we definitely need to do more of.

Thursday

Another busy busy day – but all was for the Bluebell today.

Firstly, I had a Bluebell Trust meeting at 10 o'clock at Sheffield Park, having already seen Lisa beforehand for a catch up on general stuff. The Trust meeting was productive and, although it lasted three hours, it was worthwhile as we made several important decisions, as well as receiving the news we have a bequest of around £170k coming to us. That is in addition to the £95k of donations for varying projects we have received into the Trust since January. Such bequests and donations are essential for the Trust to continue the vital support they give to many projects around the railway.

Then it was off to C&W for my weekly catch-up with the team. I was delighted the team returned the RMB, 1818, back to traffic today after being out for four weeks having bodywork repairs and some patch painting done and fixing the boiler. 1818 looks really smart again, and many thanks are due to everyone involved for pulling out all the stops to make this happen.

Back to Sheffield Park for the BRPS Board meeting at 6.30pm. That went very well, and we got through all the business and were finished by about 8.15pm. Much of the business could be characterised as routine and 'run of the mill' stuff, but it still needs the Board's attention.

The train service was busy today with two coach parties on the first train and with quite a lot of walk-up passengers too. The second departure was well filled, and the Wealden Rambler was 75% full. Catering also had a good day, with the new homemade pie selections continuing to be very popular. So, a good day for the business all round.

Today's very extensive shunt was again done using the 'O1' which was great to see. By the end of the day a fine selection of wagons and a van had been assembled for the freight train working at the weekend. This will showcase the splendid results of much hard work done by the Goods Division.



Friday

The final preparations for Road meets Rail were going on and there was quite a buzz around the place. Many of the traction engines were arriving at Horsted Keynes, although some were already on site, as they had arrived earlier in the week.

Trains were well-loaded and again the pies were selling like there was no tomorrow. This is all great for our income and, although we must remain on a “war” footing, what we have achieved so far is definitely working. We have almost £1m in the bank (half of which is for advance sales for events like Flying Scotsman and other pre-bookings), and we have not needed to use the overdraft. We must remain careful and continue to be prudent, but we can now permit spending on some critical items. One of these is going to be the driveway at Horsted Keynes, which desperately needs the potholed surface sorting out.

And finally...

We need volunteers to assist the Sheffield Park ground staff team, looking after the mowing, weeding and grounds maintenance – so anyone that is green fingered and has some time to spare, please email lisa.boyle@bluebell-railway.com .

HOPS – can I ask that anyone who works on the railway and hasn't signed up to HOPS to please do so. It is immensely useful and allows us to communicate with everyone easily as well as having a system with which we can manage all the competency, rostering and other associated things we need to do. I am aware there have been teething issues, including a few instances where people could not be rostered because of rules set-up in the system, but this is being dealt with. Like anything new, there is always a phase when everyone has to adjust, and some system tweaks may yet be needed, but overall things are settling-in well. We have some gaps in HOPS 'membership' in every department, so, if you are one of those not yet on the system, please contact Matt Sloan to get set up – matt.sloan@bluebell-railway.com

And of course... don't forget AGM & Members Day on the 3rd of June! I am really excited, as I'm sure it will be a fantastic day. So please do come along and let's have a party after the AGM. The meeting starts at 2pm. The hog roast, burgers and bar – and more besides - will start from 4.30pm

Paul Churchman
Chairman
13th May 2023