



## **CHAIRMAN'S UPDATE – WEEK COMMENCING MONDAY 13<sup>th</sup> NOVEMBER 2023**

Christmas is all but here! Well, that's how it feels at the Railway as we prepare to start our Festive season, hopefully entertaining thousands of people in the coming six weeks.

It has been full steam ahead this week with the final preparations being done for the commencement of 'Steamlights' and then 'Santas,' which start on the 25<sup>th</sup>.

### **Monday**

Nothing moving but lots going on having run Steamlights test trains over the weekend, so as to identify any issues and do any needed "snagging" before releasing the product upon the public.

For me it's a week of non-stop activity with two days at the Bluebell as well as dashing around for the day job.

### **Tuesday**

'Archie' was out on test runs again today and is performing well. The Infrastructure team were facing frustration as the Wickham trolley suffered a catastrophic failure: disintegration of part of its transmission system. This unsung and diminutive piece of equipment is a vital tool, used by Infrastructure in their daily work and its unplanned exit from service is a major blow. Investigations are already proceeding into how and from where we might be able to source replacement parts (I am working on helping with this... I know a man!). Frustratingly, this failure means we can't now use the Wickham for doing the steamlights displays turn on duty, as we had planned and which was to have been a significant cost-saving to the operation. We will now have to revert to using the 09.

### **Wednesday**

Still lots going on and there were more Archie test runs again today, and all going well – so it's so far, so good.

### **Thursday**

A busy day today, I was at Carriage & Wagon first thing for our weekly catch up. Work is progressing well on all fronts there. The 'BG' that will become the new kitchen car is now completely gutted, the roof has been stripped ready for repainting and the doors that we are taking out are off, so that we can metal-plate those gaps, reducing the risk of water ingress (we all know what Mk1's are like for that!).

There was a good discussion about bogie overhaul and how we will complete various projects between now and Easter. It was also good to see that we have almost completed fitting one side of a 'METS' vehicle with new door locks - it is going quicker than we all thought.



Then it was off to Sheffield Park for me, as I needed to get to a Trust board meeting, for which I was late, but spending time with C&W had been necessary. Anyway, the Trust meeting went well with several decisions being made on funding and appeals.

Then it was lunch (M&S cottage pie and veg.. no Bessemer pie sadly), and a catch up with Lisa before taking charge of the signalbox as I was signalman for the dress rehearsal of Steamlights.

The dress rehearsal, I have to say, could have gone better. However, this is why we have a full test to sort out last-minute issues. We had sound volume issues in the train, connection issues on the train lights and some of the lineside generators had switched off. A good job we had run the rehearsal!

### **Friday**

The first day of Steamlights and everyone was racing around to make sure the issues from last night's test run were resolved. Special thanks are due to everyone for pulling out all the stops and getting everything sorted - and thank you to Rowan for coming in on his day off.

Happily, the first public outing for Steamlights went very well and our passengers enjoyed it. I received some feedback that it was 'excellent' – so we are off to a great start. Well done everyone who has been a part of this so far.

### **Saturday**

Today we had a Golden Arrow lunch train and Steamlights, including the 'late' round trip journey at 8pm.

All the trains were well-loaded and again our passengers seemed to have had a lovely time. The feedback from the GA passengers was fantastic commenting on how good the food and the service is, reminding me once again how fortunate we are to have our excellent GA team. They do a splendid job in an environment where it not at all easy to serve food.

### **Sunday**

Another GA lunch train plus one departure of Steamlights. I am the Duty Ops Manager today and have ended up as the signalman at Sheffield Park too, as the rostered signalman was unwell and had to go home. So, I am writing this whilst waiting for the GA to come back from its first trip. Again, a well loaded train and the food looked amazing.

Steamlights was well loaded tonight too – but I won't be sorry when that last train comes back in at 6.25pm and I can go home!

### **And finally...**

I am missing not having Bessemer Arms pie! I have to be honest, I can't wait until we start running 'Santas' so I can have some again (I really do need to get out more!).



It's been a tough week for everyone getting ready for Steamlights and we still have the Santas to inaugurate yet, but as always, we all pull together to get it done. So, a big thank you to everyone for doing their part in getting everything ready and working. Here's to a successful Festive running season.

Paul Churchman  
Chairman  
19<sup>th</sup> November 2023