



CHAIRMAN'S UPDATE – WEEK COMMENCING SAT 16th SEPTEMBER 2023

It's been another busy week and another very successful Beer Festival. Thankyou and well done to all those who helped. It gets busier and busier every year.

On the subject of 'thank yous', we haven't had a staff party this year, mainly because we have all been too busy to actually organise one. So, we *are* going to hold one, and it will be on Saturday 11th November at Sheffield Park, starting at 2pm. This is for every member of staff paid and volunteer. We will have an engine and a brake van running around in station limits and there will be hot food served in the Bessemer Arms. Food and your first drink will be free. We will be setting-up a booking facility on Eventbrite, as we did last time; this should appear in the next 2-3 weeks, so watch out for an email. I hope lots of you will be able to attend.

Saturday

It was Enchanted Weekend and in the paddock at Horsted Keynes we had real-life unicorns and a mermaid (I kid you not!). I was at the railway reviewing with Neil and the catering team the plan for fitting-out the 'BG' from the National Railway Museum as a kitchen and service car for the Golden Arrow. Afterwards, Neil and I went to see the unicorns and the mermaid – and we had our photo taken with a unicorn!

Then it was off to Sheffield Park to do a Q&A session with the older members of the 9F Club. This was a really good session with some excellent questions from the group. I did manage to get it wrong on what year carriages 18728 and 18759 arrived!

Overall, the day was a big success and the Enchanted Weekend Day 1 was well attended.

Sunday

The unicorns and mermaid and (I forgot) the fairies were back. It was busy and everyone was having a great time.

Monday

No public trains running but there was shunt going on, plus the usual behind the scenes activities that happen every day.

Tuesday

I was at the railway, starting at Carriage & Wagon as I had Nick Broderick, Associate Editor of *Trackside* with me. He was with us for two days, and I was taking him around to showcase our railway and to relate the story of how we have come through this year. From Horsted Keynes, we went off to Sheffield Park to visit the loco works and to see Lisa; then we met Neil Glaskin for dinner at the Crown in Horsted Keynes before heading back to Reigate and going to my pub for some beers.



Wednesday

Nick had a good night's sleep he said, although I may have kept him up a bit late! It was back to the railway again, where we boarded the first train at Horsted Keynes and headed up to Kingscote. We looked at the signal box as well as reviewing the efforts we are making to have a proper goods yard display there.

Then off by train to Sheffield Park for some lunch before sitting down together so Nick could interview me about the railway, our struggles, our successes and the future. I'm really excited to see how the article turns out.

Nick was evidently very impressed with what he saw, the people he met, and the enthusiasm, determination and commitment from everyone he spoke to. The obvious enjoyment of all was also clear.

The trains were busy today, several coach parties and the Rambler combined with the service train on the 2.15pm was well-loaded.

Thursday

Back at the railway again, after dropping my daughter to school. I started in C&W as usual, for our regular weekly catch up; I also had two interviews to conduct. We have a vacancy for a C&W fitter as Bruce is leaving us, which is very sad as he's been a fantastic member of the team for a number of years. Good luck in the future Bruce, and let's hope you come back to help out from time to time - we will always make you a cuppa.

The interviews went well, and we found a very suitable candidate, who has since been offered and accepted the position.

Then off to Sheffield Park for a Trust meeting. Unfortunately, I missed the first hour because of the interviews. It was a good meeting, and we approved the funds to relay the track at the bottom of Freshfield bank coming around to Ketches. We have had a steady few months of donations and bequests. This source of funds is vital and without the Trust we would really struggle to do capital investment projects.

The train service was busy again, with some coach parties plus good walk up trade. I sampled the pie, and it was delicious as always.

Friday

At the railway again. It is Day 1 of the Beer Festival and I am late-turn Duty Operating Manager. We had the pies they serve at Brighton & Hove Albion on match days - and they were delicious, although



obviously not as good as the ones our talented chefs make, but we needed volume this weekend (we actually sold 500 of the 'BHA' pies alone!).

It was busy for a Friday, the trains had good loadings and everyone was happy. I saw the last train depart and then I headed home as Neil Glaskin was around.

And finally...

It's only when you actually walk someone around who doesn't know the behind the scenes of the railway that you come to see how fantastic our railway is and how amazing, skilled and dedicated all our people are. When so many other heritage railways are struggling and you hear the stories of how despondent their volunteers are becoming with the looming financial difficulties, I look at The Bluebell and think how lucky we are. But we have to remember this has not come easy and we can't afford to take our foot off the gas – there is still so much to do.

Paul Churchman

Chairman

25th September 2023