



CHAIRMAN'S UPDATE – WEEK COMMENCING SAT 22nd JULY 2023

The week has shot by again and it's been a busy one. I am sitting in the lounge at Gatwick South as I write this, as I am off to Menorca for a week with the family – it's not raining there, and their summer is actually hot... unlike ours!

Saturday

Day 1 of Shaun the Sheep and it was a busy day with lots of families enjoying the experience. Trains were running well - we had a Wealden Rambler and an evening Golden Arrow as well. It was a weekend away from the railway for me, as my niece was getting married.

Sunday

Day 2 of Shaun the Sheep, and a rather disappointing day for visitor numbers. I put this down to the fact the sun had come out and, Saturday having been so dismal, everyone went to the seaside instead of coming to see Shaun. We more than covered the costs of putting on the event, but it was still a shame Sunday wasn't as busy as Saturday. The Golden Arrow lunch train was well filled.

Monday

Trains were running today as we are into the school summer holidays. It was a quietish day, but the first week of the summer holidays is always a difficult one to predict – it can be a bit 'up and down' as there is the usual mass exodus of people going away, plus parents haven't quite got to the point of urgently needing the kids out of the house so they don't kill each other!

There was also a shunt, and the Golden Arrow set was taken up to Carriage and Wagon at Horsted Keynes for its six-monthly scheduled maintenance visit to the works.

Tuesday

Today was very busy, with about double the numbers of Monday. As I said, you just can't forecast this first week! I'm not complaining though... we had a good trading day, with plenty of secondary spend in Catering and in the shop.

I received a call in the afternoon from Rowan Millard in C&W. Rowan rarely phones me, so if he does, I know there must be a problem. The issue was that a broken spring and bolt had been discovered during the maintenance inspection of 3069 (Mk1 FO from the GA set). Repairing this type of (B4) bogie was not something we had ever attempted previously. The challenge was compounded by the fact we had planned to deal with this vehicle first, so we could put it in to the Wealden Rambler set in order to withdraw MK1 SO 4824! So, lots of thinking to be done. It was agreed we would review matters again on Wednesday, once Rowan and the team had discussed all the options, and they had called a couple of other railways.



Wednesday

Middle of the week again and I just want it to be Saturday, so I can go on holiday! I've planned to cram in five gym sessions this week, plus I have plenty going on at the day job.

The Railway was quiet again, I put this down to today's awful weather. However, it still wasn't as bad as Monday.

Rowan and Clive in C&W had come up with a plan which would have 3069 fixed by late August, while substituting 1336 (Maunsell Third Open) into the Wealden Rambler set, so that 4824 can be taken out of service as previously scheduled. So, very well done to everyone in C&W for analysing the unforeseen bogie problem, and for working up a solution so quickly.

4824 is actually up for sale as it now requires a major overhaul and, as we have enough Mk1's, we don't need to keep it. Plus, we can better direct our money and resources towards something more 'heritage' such as 100-seater, 971.

Thursday

9 am saw me arrive at C&W for my weekly catch-up with the team, to review how we are progressing on all projects; also, to deal with departmental director matters. Lots was going on, with good progress being made with the painting of Car 54, and the Bicester Mk1 is also coming together well. Given the issue with its bogie, we have decided to fit 3069 with the set of commonwealth bogies we recently bought, which were received in running condition; the overhaul of 3069's own bogies being delayed for now. Taking this approach we can have 3069 ready for late August, and we will still be able to out-shop the Bicester Mk1 for Steamlights/Christmas. When Christmas running is over, we will bring the Bicester Mk1 back in to receive her newly overhauled set of commonwealth bogies.

Off to Sheffield Park at midday, where I had meetings with Lisa and Neil, then with Chris Barber. I also popped in to see the 84030 gang, and the Atlantic team. Work on both locos is progressing, with the Atlantic really taking shape now.

The railway was busy again today, despite the unsettled weather.

4pm and it was PLC Board meeting time, with plenty to be discussed. Chris Barber presented his strategy on Bluebell people – our biggest and most valuable asset – covering how we need to recruit, train, invest and look after everyone. It is an excellent piece of work; look out for more from Chris about this in Bluebell Times over the coming months.

It was now 6.30pm and the Board meeting was not over, but I had to go and pick up my youngest daughter to transport her home so she could go and see the new Barbie movie with her sisters.



I handed over to Roy Watts to cover the last three agenda items (IT, Communications and Any Other Business). I hate leaving a meeting before it's finished, but the wrath of a 15-year-old daughter was not something I needed!

Regarding IT and our website, I think we can all accept there are improvements to be made, and we are moving ahead with changes to the website. The intention is to make things much more integrated, which hasn't really been the case to date. Nigel Page has the thankless task of dealing with this; he probably feels rather bruised at times, as everyone likes to criticise and generally moan about IT. It is too easy to criticise – yet we all do it - but Nigel and his team do a really good job and deserve recognition for having transformed our IT over the past year. More improvements will be coming.

Friday

I was at work and trying to cram everything in before going on holiday; this included plenty of Bluebell work. It was a sad day at work as Neil Glaskin was leaving us for a new and exciting opportunity. Having Neil in the office has been great, and he will be much missed (especially as we could always get together to discuss Bluebell matters!). Good luck Neil, in your new role.

The Railway was averagely busy - which was of course good; let's hope the coming weekend will see plenty of visitors.

And finally...

HOPS ("Oh no," you all groan: "not this again!" Yes: this again!)

We have approved payment for new computers, which are to be strategically located around the Railway, so that those otherwise lacking access to a computer will be able to do so - and thus will be able to log in to access HOPS.

As a reminder, from the 1st September, if you are not registered on HOPS and have not completed the Working at Height course, then you will not be allowed to work on the railway until you have done so. As I have explained before, this is not the Bluebell being draconian. The ORR *require* us to have a system to manage our people, their records, their competencies and to be able to communicate training material and notices. So, we have adopted HOPS for this purpose, and it is working well.

Again, as I have said previously, everyone who works at the Bluebell will at some point work at height... even if that height is only six inches off the ground, it is still classed as Working at Height by the law. Immediately prior to the Board meeting on Thursday, we received an email telling us that a volunteer had died this week on a heritage railway, having fallen whilst working on a carriage. This is obviously an absolute tragedy for everyone involved, and our thoughts go out to all involved,



especially the family of the deceased. We may be absolutely certain that this incident will focus the ORR even more on making sure we are all complying with Working at Height regulations.

The Bluebell prides itself on its safety culture, striving for the highest standards. We will maintain this focus, educating and training our people wherever necessary. The Board and I are absolutely committed to this policy, and there will be no compromise. So, please, everyone, *pay full attention to safety.*

Paul Churchman

Chairman

29th July 2023