



(NOT THE) CHAIRMAN'S UPDATE – WEEK COMMENCING SAT 29TH JULY

Hi all, its Neil here this week... Paul has taken Mrs C and the family away for a week and is hopefully enjoying some better weather than those of us around the railway have over the last few days. To give him a proper break I am writing this week's update.

Firstly, to clarify something from Paul's last update, I am not leaving the Bluebell (as if I could escape that easily!). I am changing my employed job (the one I get paid for!) and will be starting a new job with East Sussex County Council later this month. My Bluebell service will continue as normal - although it would be good to find a Commercial Director to relieve me of some of my responsibilities!

Saturday

No special events today; we were operating a standard 'service C' with the Wealden Rambler afternoon tea service. Despite no additional attractions, the railway passenger numbers were good and there was lots going on around the place. At Sheffield Park work continued on the class 73, although it was a case of one step forward and two steps back, as the loco keeps throwing up more problems. It is to be expected that a 60-year-old loco which has seen minimal use for many years will have a few issues that need to be resolved. However, Paul Auckland - with the support of Mark Bott, Chris Haynes and Stuart Marks and a few other volunteers - is determined to make sure these are all dealt with before the loco is handed over for traffic.

It was a rare weekend off from the Bluebell for me, so I had a day out to the Kent and East Sussex Railway with my sister and her family. It's always good to see what's happening on our fellow heritage lines, and I was able to enjoy a ride in one of their Maunsell coaches, whetting the appetite for travelling in 3786 in the future.

Sunday

It was a bit quieter today. This seems to be the pattern now - over the last few years we have found Saturday is our busier weekend day, with Sunday being quieter. As the Pullman set is out for maintenance now, there was no Golden Arrow lunch service, but an additional Wealden Rambler operated.

At the end of the operating day a problem was found with 6989 Wightwick Hall: the small-end on one side had run hot. Unfortunately, this meant that the Hall had to be taken out of service, with 80151 needing to deputise on Monday.

Monday

Table C was operating, with 80151 and 65 hauling the trains. It was not such a busy day for passengers, unfortunately.



Monday morning saw Simon Blaker and Henry Mowforth set to work on 6989: the offending small end was removed, and the failure was found to be down to a blocked oilway. The blockage was cleared and a pin and bush reworked. The loco could then be put back together and prepared for service on Tuesday. Thank you to Simon and Henry for doing the repair so rapidly, getting the loco back in to traffic with only one day missed.

Tuesday

Along with Wightwick Hall, the dinosaurs were back - and so were the passengers... all trains were really busy. Dinosaurs do seem to be popular!

The big news today was Santa Special tickets went on sale, and within minutes of the email and social media posts going out, the bookings were coming in. The Santa Specials are such a valuable product to the railway and, much loved by our visitors, they always sell well, providing valuable income that will help see the railway through the next winter. What must not be underestimated is the amount of work that goes into preparing the website, booking system and customer information for these events. So, a huge thankyou to the marketing and customer services teams for all the work they have done getting Santa on sale.

Wednesday

Day 2 of the dinosaurs and another really busy day. In all the years I have been here I never expected to meet a T-Rex outside the Bessemer Arms! These smaller events that add to our existing train service offer have proved a real success for the railway this year. They have brought in many extra passengers and we know from comments made by many of these customers, they had not been to the Bluebell before. Well done to Sarah Jaban who has been organising these events - and I know Sarah has some exciting ideas for more of these events later in the year too.

Chris Knibbs is having a well-earned week off, so today was the first of three days for me covering as Duty Operations Manager ('DoM'). I was also shunter as, for operational requirements, we had moved the shunt from its usual Thursday slot this week. One task undertaken was to move a Grampus chassis from the down yard to the up yard at Horsted Keynes. After some attention this is going to be used by the 'Thumper' gang to hold the spare engine that was acquired with their unit. We also had a "Can you just" request to prepare a train for a late booking in connection with a photo shoot to take place on Friday. Unfortunately, the weather was most unsuitable for shunting and I ended up extremely damp!

Thursday

A much brighter day today and although the dinosaurs had moved on, we were still busy with passengers enjoying our trains. The '01' was looking particularly nice in the sunshine with its gleaming brasswork.

My second day as DoM, and a bit more shunting. This time it was all in Horsted Keynes up yard, as part of a sort out of the sidings and general tidy up... it's going to be a long job! The Carriage & Wagon department's Sentinel shunter "Skipper" was our motive power, which gave the opportunity



for Clive from C&W to be passed-out to drive this loco by Inspector Chris Suiters. I was also joined by Matt Sloan who was training to be a DoM. Whilst on that subject, we have another training session coming up for anyone interested in becoming a DoM, so if you already hold a safety-critical grade on the railway and would be interested in covering this role, please do get in touch.

As part of the shunt, we also moved 'U' class 1638 to just behind Horsted signal box, so it is now in a more visible position from passing trains as well as being more accessible for members of the Maunsell Society who are tidying up its appearance.

The '01' has been operated by an all-female crew this week, made up of sisters Ruth Lee and Liz Groome along with Hannah Thorpe. They were joined on the first trip today by Ruth and Liz's father Clive Groome, and it was great to see Clive - a former BR and Bluebell driver - back at the railway.

Friday

My final day this week as DoM and I had a slightly later start as I was also rostered as guard on the evening's Supper Special.

The photo shoot mentioned earlier took place at Kingscote, and the '09' was used to position some of our beautiful vintage coaches for the photographers. The normal services operated around this and although not the busiest of days, passenger numbers were good.

It wasn't such a busy day for me, which gave me the chance to catch up with Megan Laughlin our Catering Manager and with Mark Lill our Shop Manager, about the work they are doing. I also reviewed publicity matters with James Cummins. I had time to chat with Dave Middleton too: Dave is a great support to Chris and me in the Operations Department.

Now I know what you're all thinking: it has got to Friday and he's not mentioned pies! I hate to disappoint, so I can announce that today's pie was steak and stilton - and very nice it was too.

I concluded my day by guarding the Supper Special, where our volunteer team worked as hard as they always do, to serve the guests with fish and chips. I enjoyed the ride to East Grinstead and back behind 6989, and the sun even came out for a bit!

And finally...

No update has arrived yet from York, regarding a certain Gresley Pacific, so we are all hoping it is a case of 'no news is good news,' as we continue to prepare for the scheduled visit at the end of the month.

This week's appeal is for help in the shop at Sheffield Park. We could really do with a few more volunteers to help in this outlet which brings in such valuable income to the railway. With our expanding range of products, business is increasing but Mark and his team need some help, especially during the visit of Flying Scotsman. So, if you think this could be for you, please drop me an email or speak to Mark, Michael or Ian in the shop.



I'm sure Paul will be back to share with you what has been happening next week but for now, from me, a big thank you for all that you are doing to support our great railway.
Best wishes and take care everyone.

Neil Glaskin
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