



## **CHAIRMAN'S UPDATE – WEEK COMMENCING SAT 30<sup>th</sup> SEPTEMBER 2023**

So, another eventful week in the life of the Bluebell. The things you have to deal with as heritage railway chairman are at times mind boggling! The bizarre emails making requests or complaints and also “good ideas” are always rolling in, and, as I am sure my predecessors would agree, it often makes me ask myself whether is this real. Equally, sometimes emails arrive which are real ‘light bulb’ moments. In reality, this is all just a part of the job and, having signed-up to being Chair, all aspects simply have to be accepted and taken in one’s stride.

Overall, this week went so quickly it seemed a bit of a blur.

### **Saturday**

It was Day 1 of Superheroes weekend and we were busy, which was good. I do have a suspicion we had a number of adults without kids coming to see the Superheroes (Mrs C was tempted but she had to cook in one of our pubs)!

Trains were well-filled and it was a good day.

### **Sunday**

Day 2 of Superheroes and again we were pleasantly busy. It was evident we had a large number of families in and there was a good feeling around the railway.

### **Monday**

No trains today, but all the usual behind the scenes stuff going on. We are now gearing up operationally for SteamLights and Santa - and so the hectic times have begun.

### **Tuesday**

Various ‘dynamic’ test work on ‘Archie’ is ongoing and it is moving around in steam and under its own power, with a number of test runs planned for this week. So far, so good and a return to traffic for Santas is very much on the cards.

Mrs C and I met up with Tim Dunn in the evening at my pub in Reigate for a catch up. It never ceases to amaze me the knowledge Tim has about railway history. He is also a massive supporter of the heritage sector and has brought so much more visibility of it through his programmes on Yesterday.

### **Wednesday**

Trains were running today and there was a good amount of party traffic. Having the observation car on the back of the service set, charging a premium to ride in it to see the autumn tints, was working well and is far more cost efficient than running a separate Autumn Tints train.



### **Thursday**

I wasn't at the Railway for my usual "Thursday" owing to work commitments and the fact I needed to be there Friday.

Again, a good amount of schools and group traffic and the Wealden Rambler element of the 2.15 departure was well loaded.

### **Friday**

I was at Railway from late morning as I needed to meet with the team who are spearheading Rail 200 in 2025 from GBRTT (Great British Railways Transformation Team). For those of you who don't know it is the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first passenger railway from Stockton to Darlington on 1825.

We want to be at the forefront of this historic event and to play our part in celebrating this, using it as an opportunity to raise our profile, inspire the next generation and hopefully gain some lasting legacies.

The GBRTT folks seemed very taken with our ideas but, as with all these things, there is still more dialogue to be had. The main thing is we are one of the first railways to go to them with ideas, and they were really impressed with what we are looking at.

It was a single train/two departure service and again we saw a good amount of group traffic and also walk up traffic too.

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

Not everything that I or the senior leadership of the Railway do is universally popular. I make no apologies for that. The motivation for everything that the directors, trustees, governors and myself undertake is directed to achieving the very best for the Bluebell Railway, its survival and prosperity.

I try to be as open as I can with everything we do and I promise that while I am Chairman that will *always* be the case. We all do this for our love of heritage railways and more importantly the Bluebell.

Paul Churchman  
Chairman  
10<sup>th</sup> October 2023