



# Between The Lines

Spring 2026

## Welcome From the Chair of Trustees

As Chair of Trustees, I would like to extend a very warm welcome to everyone reading the Spring 2026 edition of *Between the Lines*.

Over the past few months, our volunteers have once again demonstrated the dedication and enthusiasm that keeps the Somerset & Dorset Railway Heritage Trust moving forward. Thanks to their hard work, several improvements have been made around the station site at Midsomer Norton. These may not always be the most visible achievements, but they are vital to maintaining and enhancing the environment we all value so highly. Every cleared pathway, repaired structure and maintained facility reflects the commitment of the people who give their time to the Trust.

The winter events programme proved to be a great success. Our Halloween and Santa events were particularly well received, bringing many families and visitors to the railway and helping to spread a little seasonal magic. We rounded off the festive period with our traditional New Year's Day Mince Pie Specials. Visitor numbers were good and although it was disappointing not to have a steam locomotive available this year, running a diesel locomotive enhanced our profits and was less demanding on the Operations Department.



Great Day Out Event (Roger Burfitt)

As we now look ahead to the 2026 season, one challenge stands out clearly: the need to attract many more new volunteers across all departments of the railway. The Trust already asks a great deal of those who give their time so generously, and it is fair to say that none of us are getting any younger.

If we are to maintain the progress we have made and continue developing the railway for future generations, bringing in new people and new skills will be essential. Volunteering with the Trust does not necessarily mean working on the railway site itself. Even if you live some distance away, there are still many ways you could help. We always need support with administration, fundraising and communications.



Haunted castle for Halloween (Keith Turk)



# Between The Lines

Spring 2026

There are also opportunities to represent the Trust at events in your local area, helping to raise awareness of the railway and what we do. In addition, we currently have vacant roles within the membership team which would greatly benefit from new volunteers.

Every contribution, large or small, makes a real difference. Whether you can spare a few hours occasionally or take on a more regular role, your support helps ensure that the story and legacy of the Somerset & Dorset Railway continues to be shared and enjoyed.

Thank you, as always, to everyone who supports the Trust — our volunteers, members and visitors. I look forward to seeing many familiar faces, and hopefully some new ones too, as the 2026 season gets underway.

With best wishes for the year ahead.

**Roger Burfitt**

## Events Programme 2026

The start of the 2026 season is nearly upon us, and this year we hopefully have an events programme with something for everyone. We have amended the standard timetable, to include two extra trains, and to cut the lunchbreak, in order to give more interest to visitors. The first train for standard days will still be 10.30am. but will run at 40 minute intervals rather than the previous hourly schedule. This allows for an extra train in the morning. Services resume at 13.50pm for the afternoon, again at 40 minute intervals with the last departure at 15.10pm. Again this squeezes in an extra service.

There is a focus on more family events, and the season kicks off with Easter at the Station. What better mix than trains and family fun for our first running weekend. The children can take part in an Easter Hunt, and

must keep their eyes open in case the Easter Bunny appears!

There are a number of new events for 2026, the first being Locals Day. This is a standard running day, but as a one-off, tickets are half-price to encourage people to experience the railway and see what we have to offer. Hopefully they will like what they see and come again.

May will see two big events, on each of the bank holiday weekends. Firstly on 3<sup>rd</sup> & 4<sup>th</sup> May there is the 1940's Weekend. Re-enactors, vehicles, displays, and a whole lot more evoking the Home Front. In addition, there will be a plaque unveiled in honour of the members of the Midsomer Norton Home Guard.



Later, on 24<sup>th</sup> May, you will need to be very wary, as there will be dinosaurs on the loose! Baby dinosaurs will be on the trains, meeting and greeting people, and afterwards you can learn all about "training" dinosaurs at the show. Tickets will be limited so book early.

More family fun in August with the return of the Midsomer Summer Fun Day, and for the bank holiday weekend a Teddy Bears Picnic. With plenty to keep the children occupied, both events should prove popular with families.



# Between The Lines

Spring 2026

For enthusiasts, there is the 1940's event mentioned above. We will also have a Heritage Day and a Gala in September- more details of these events will be available shortly.

For something a bit different, we will also be holding Wickham Wednesdays in school holidays, when you can ride the Wickham Trolley along the full length of the line. If you haven't done this before, it is a very different experience and thoroughly recommended. Brake Van rides are another popular attraction, and there will be several chances to ride on the veranda of the Queen Mary Brake Van through the year.

The season will close with the ever popular Halloween and Santa events.

Hopefully we have something to interest everyone as we want more people to come and enjoy the railway and all it has to offer. We look forward to seeing you at these events.

**Keith Turk, Events Coordinator**

## Building for the Future:

### Plans for a Workshop and Rolling Stock Maintenance Depot at Tunnel Lane

One of the long-standing challenges for the railway has been how best to care for and maintain the rolling stock that makes our passenger services possible. At present, much of our passenger carriage fleet is stored outside and exposed to the elements throughout the year. While this has allowed us to operate and expand our services, it inevitably accelerates wear and deterioration of vehicles that are both historically important and increasingly costly to maintain.

For this reason, the railway is now exploring plans to develop a Workshop and Rolling

Stock Maintenance Depot at our Tunnel Lane site. The aim of this facility is straightforward but vital: to provide covered accommodation and proper engineering facilities so that our locomotives and carriages can be maintained, repaired, and preserved in a controlled environment.

### Protecting Our Passenger Carriages

Our passenger carriages are among the most valuable assets the railway owns. Many of them are historic vehicles that require careful maintenance and periodic restoration. Unfortunately, being stored outdoors exposes them continuously to rain, wind, temperature changes, and general weathering.

A covered workshop and storage facility would significantly extend the life of these vehicles by protecting them from the elements. It would also allow volunteers and staff to carry out repairs and maintenance more efficiently and safely, ensuring that our carriages remain in service for many years to come.

### Proper Facilities for Locomotive Maintenance

The proposed depot would also provide suitable facilities for maintaining our locomotives and our Diesel Multiple Unit (DMU). At present, maintenance tasks are often constrained by limited space and exposure to weather conditions.

A dedicated workshop would allow engineering work to take place under cover, with the tools, equipment, and space required to undertake routine maintenance and more substantial overhauls. This would improve reliability, reduce long-term maintenance costs, and make the railway a more practical environment for both volunteers and professional contractors working on our equipment.



# Between The Lines

Spring 2026

## Supporting Future Steam Operations

Looking ahead, the proposed facility is also essential if the railway is to host **steam locomotives**, whether these are owned by the railway itself or hired in for special events and services.

Steam locomotives require appropriate servicing, inspection, and maintenance facilities. Without such infrastructure, it becomes extremely difficult to operate steam traction regularly or to attract visiting engines. A proper maintenance depot would therefore open the door to future steam operation and the wider opportunities and visitor interest that this could bring.

## Working Through the Planning Process

To help us navigate the complex planning requirements involved in such a development, we have engaged the services of **Planning Sphere**, who are guiding us through the various pre-planning processes required before a formal application can be submitted.

These processes include assessments relating to:

- Transport and highways
- Ecology
- Landscaping

Once this work is complete, we hope to submit a **Pre-Planning Application to Somerset Council before the end of April**.

The purpose of this pre-application stage is to obtain early guidance from the planning authority on what may be acceptable for the site — or indeed whether any development is likely to be permitted. This feedback will help shape the final proposal before a full planning application is prepared.

## The Planning Performance Agreement

As part of the process, the railway will enter into a **Planning Performance Agreement (PPA)** with Somerset Council. In UK planning terms, a PPA is a voluntary and collaborative agreement between a local planning authority and an applicant. It acts as a project management framework, setting out agreed timescales, resources, and actions for progressing complex planning applications from the pre-application stage through to a final decision.

Importantly, the **proposed station halt at Tunnel Lane** will also form part of this Planning Performance Agreement.



Initial Site Survey Meeting with Chris Beaver, Planning Sphere Consultants

## Traffic and Access Considerations

One of the issues carefully examined during the early stages of the project has been the potential impact on traffic along Tunnel Lane.

A survey of traffic volumes has been carried out and the results confirm that traffic levels are sufficiently low that the Highways Authority may not object to the regular movement of large vehicles delivering building materials to the site during construction.



# Between The Lines

Spring 2026

In addition, we have reached an agreement with a neighbouring landowner allowing us to use part of her field for the delivery and off-loading of building materials. This arrangement will ensure that contractors can unload safely without blocking Tunnel Lane, helping to minimise disruption to local residents and road users.

## Looking Ahead

While the project is still at an early stage, the proposed workshop and maintenance depot represents a significant step toward securing the long-term future of the railway's rolling stock and operations.

As we progress through the planning stages over the coming months, we will continue to keep members and supporters informed of developments.

The railway has always relied on the enthusiasm and support of its members, volunteers, and local community. This project is another example of the long-term thinking required to preserve and operate our railway for future generations to enjoy.

## Keith Bottomley, Project Lead



Bar Car arriving at Midsomer Norton (Matt Cornborough)

## A Practical Addition to the Fleet:

### Why We Purchased the Bar Car

The recent purchase of the Bar Car from the Swanage Railway represents a practical and timely opportunity for our railway. With the Brake Standard Open (BSO) having now returned to its home line on the North Yorkshire Moors Railway, the acquisition ensures that we can maintain our operational coaching fleet without the need for costly or difficult sourcing elsewhere.

Finding open-seating Tourist Standard Open (TSO) coaches in serviceable condition has become extremely difficult in the heritage railway sector. Vehicles suitable for immediate or near-immediate passenger use are rarely available at an affordable price – or indeed at any price. As a result, when the opportunity arose to purchase the Bar Car – formerly part of the Swanage Railway's now withdrawn Wessex Belle Dining Car Train, it presented a sensible and cost-effective solution.



Interior of the Bar Car (Roger Burfitt)



# Between The Lines

Spring 2026

Although known as a Restaurant Miniature Buffet (RMB), our vehicle is in essence simply a converted TSO. Structurally and operationally it remains very similar to the open-saloon coaches already familiar across many heritage railways. This means it can be readily adapted back for conventional passenger operation to replace the departed BSO whilst still retaining the option to provide on-train catering from time to time. RMB coaches are greatly valued across the heritage railway network for this reason.



Because of this heritage, preparing the coach for passenger service will require only minimal work and very modest expenditure. The vehicle effectively gives us something that is increasingly rare in today's preservation environment: an open-saloon coach that can be returned to service quickly and economically.

In practical terms, the railway has therefore secured something extremely valuable — our very own TSO-type vehicle at a time when such coaches are almost impossible to obtain. The purchase not only replaces the capacity lost with the departure of the BSO but also strengthens the resilience and flexibility of our passenger operations for the future.

The potential of the Bar Car goes beyond simply providing a replacement catering coach. The intention is to develop it into an attractive catering vehicle that will enhance the experience for our passengers. By creating a welcoming space where refreshments can be served, the catering team will be able to expand their offer and provide an even better level of service during train operations and special events. At the same time, the coach will provide a versatile interior space that can also be used as a comfortable meeting and gathering area. This will be particularly valuable for volunteer briefings, small events, and social gatherings, offering a pleasant and practical environment within the railway's own rolling stock.

In short, the Bar Car offers flexibility, practicality and opportunity. It replaces lost capacity following the departure of the BSO, provides a rare open-saloon vehicle at minimal cost, and creates new possibilities for improved catering and on-board facilities. What began life as a converted TSO will now become a valuable and attractive asset that can support both passengers and volunteers for many years to come.

**Roger Burfitt**

## The New S&D Emporium Takes Shape

There's always a moment in any good project when you realise it's grown a little bigger than expected—and our transformation of the BG into the expanded Second Hand and Donated Emporium is no exception. The good news is that the internal refurbishment is now well underway, and although there's still work to do, we're aiming to throw open the doors by May.



# Between The Lines

Spring 2026

A huge thank-you goes to Steve Jeffrey, Dave Stickland, Dave Drury and the rest of the team whose hard work has pushed the project forward. Soon, Dave Gilson will be fitting the new electrics, while Phil Jones is coordinating the installation of fresh flooring. When complete, the BG will be a real credit to everyone involved.



BG – work in progress (Keith Turk)

The new space is a major step up from the trusty CCT that served us so well until the end of last year. We'll need every inch of it too—our shelves will be brimming with donated books, model railway items and railwayana, all generously contributed. The superb N-scale model of Midsomer Norton in the 1950s will also have room to shine in a much-improved display area.

Meanwhile, the emporium team—led by Paul Short and including Helen Davies, Andrew Marsden, Matt Skidmore and others—has been doing sterling work sorting through stock in preparation for the big move. Paul and Helen even secured high-quality display cabinets from the now-closed model railway

shop in Midsomer Norton, ensuring our new home will look the part from day one.

A special thank-you to Head of Catering Sue Trott for letting us use Callendar's Cabin as a temporary sorting and storage space. We promise to vacate by the end of April!

We can't wait to welcome both familiar faces and new visitors to the refreshed S&D Emporium—bigger, brighter, and better than ever.

**Paul Short, Emporium Manager**

## Signalling Update

### What's happened since the last update?

Well, quite a lot actually. Winter is the time we undertake the annual maintenance of the signalling equipment so since the closure of the railway after the Santas we have been busy lubricating the signal mechanisms, both inside the signal box and trackside. All the electrical systems, especially the track circuits, need to be tested to ensure they remain within specified limits and the entire signalling system checked for correct operation. Thanks to John Stevens and Dave Gilson for their work on the electrics. Annual maintenance includes the points, testing that the facing point locks operate correctly, again within specified tolerances.

### The Outer Home signal was treating every lever pull like a polite suggestion

Not strictly part of the annual maintenance but we have had some ongoing issues with the Outer Home signal (No's 23 / 25). This signal is electrically operated and sometimes when moving the lever in the signal box, the signal arm takes a long time to move or even fails to move altogether. We know the system is working because the electronic route indicator



# Between The Lines

Spring 2026

operates correctly and we had a suspicion that the problem was with the electric motor. This was recovered from Larbert Junction near Stirling via the Bo'ness and Kinneal railway and is well over 50 years old. Anyway, the motor was removed, the internals cleaned, tested and re-installed. At the time of writing, it is performing as intended – thanks to Tony Aldred for his expertise with electric motors.

## We welcome Two New Signallers

Just before Christmas we were able to assess and pass out two new signallers, David and Ben Phillips who are now competent to undertake signalling duties without supervision – well done to them.



David & Ben Phillips with Matt Cornborough & Stuart Garner, Head of Signalling (Keith Turk)

## Troublesome Points

Another big job has been to attempt to ease the operation of the crossover points (15a and 15b). We have always found these points to be very stiff when returning them to the normal position. Both points are operated from the single No. 15 lever in the signal box – we tried disconnecting the rodding run between 15a and 15b so that the lever only operated 15a – the operation was then easy peasy. Disconnecting 15a, the operation of 15b on its own was also easy.

The problem occurs when both sets of points are linked together for normal operation. David and Ben Phillips have taken the lead on trying to find out why it takes disproportionate effort to work these points. This remains work in progress.

**We knew the No. 8 signal arm was getting tired, but it chose the Santas to make its grand exit.**

Elsewhere we have had to replace the signal arm on No. 8 Down Home signal. We were aware that the wooden signal arm was showing signs of rot and planned to replace it in January. However, it decided to let go during the Santas (see photo), necessitating appointing a hand signaller to bring the Santa trains safely back into the station. Richard Billington has taken the lead on sourcing timber (sapele) and getting it trimmed to size with the correct taper on the thickness. At the time of writing the replacement is receiving its final coats of paint and should be back in place for the start of the new season.



The Broken Signal (Stuart Garner)



# Between The Lines

Spring 2026

## The Signal Box has received some important maintenance.

The signal box itself has also been receiving attention to replace the south gable end finial and fascia boards. Dave Read has led on this project, including erecting scaffolding for safe access to the gable end. The final painting of the finial and fascias allowed the scaffolding to be removed, improving the look of the Up platform.

## A Good Turn Done

In conclusion for this report, we must say thank you to Dave Beard and Dave Stickland for using their first class skills in turning out the two Finials which now enhance the appearance of our signal box. A superb job expertly done.

## Stuart Garner, Head of Signalling

## Permanent Way Update – Early 2026

The first three months of the year are always a favourite period for the P-Way gang. With no trains running, the team has uninterrupted access to the line, making it the perfect time for essential maintenance. The start of 2026 has been no exception—though this year came with the added excitement of finally beginning work on the long-awaited Somervale Sidings.

January and early February saw several Sundays devoted to jacking and packing on the Down line near the Engineer's Sidings. These sessions focused on smoothing out low spots and adding ballast where needed. The job has become far more efficient thanks to the Trust's powered portable tamping machines, which have replaced the back-breaking shovel work once required.



The Track Gang (Pat Stevenson)

As February progressed, preparations for Somervale began in earnest. The first task was a gentle trim of the grass to tidy the site. Many willing hands and strong arms have moved fresh wooden sleepers into position, ready for use in the turnout section of the sidings. The new Road Rail Vehicle (RRV) is key to really progressing the project. Before it can be brought into service those who are being trained to operate the RRV must have their competencies assessed. We are waiting for the assessor to confirm a date when the assessment can be done. Safe operation is critical when using this type of vehicle.

My thanks must go to our dedicated and skilled team without whom there simply would be no railway on which trains can safely operate. It is hard work, even so we are a cheerful bunch and if you like to come and join us, perhaps for a taster session to see volunteering for the Permanent Way Team (AKA The Track Gang) is something you might enjoy, do come along. We are at the railway station most Sundays and our day starts with a brew in our very own mess van.

## Somervale Sidings – A Big Step Forward for the Railway

While the engineering work is impressive, the real benefit will be felt once the sidings are complete. At present, every operating day starts and ends with a long shunting routine to



# Between The Lines

Spring 2026

clear stored rolling stock out of the station before trains can run—and then put it all back again afterwards. The new sidings will remove this daily chore entirely, giving the Operations team a much smoother start and finish to the day.

The station will also look far better. With stock moved to its own dedicated area at Somervale, the platforms and approaches will no longer resemble a storage yard. Instead, visitors will be greeted by a cleaner, more open, and more authentic heritage station scene.

Somervale Sidings will make the railway easier to run and more attractive to visit—a real win all round.

**Trevor Hodge, Head of Permanent Way**

## News from the Museum

As we start our new operating season we would like to share our plans for the year. As you will know the Wells hut is now located adjacent to the museum. Once it has been renovated it will become an annex to the museum, within which we hope to make aspects of our collection more available to our visitors.



The Wells Hut (Roger Taylor)

Initially we will focus on items related to signalling, displaying equipment such as lever plates, Whitaker apparatus, Tyler's tablet machines and Look Out armbands with explanations of their uses. The wall space will enable us to display artwork and information boards.

We are pleased to say that the Pill Box has now been made waterproof curing the leaky roof. This will greatly improve the conditions within the Pill Box (below) and so protect the exhibits from the damp.



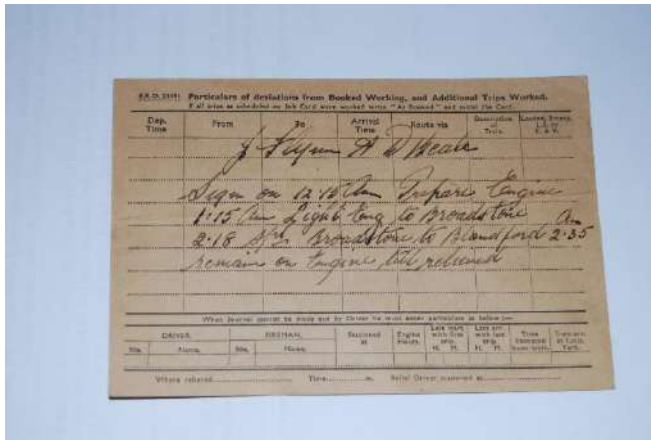
This cluster of four buildings, museum, Anderson Shelter, Pill Box and Wells hut helps unify the visitor experience of wider aspects of the social history of the site.

Our collection of items within the museum continues to grow and the addition of the Wells hut is a very welcome addition. Recently we have been fortunate to acquire items of a more ephemeral nature such as items of paperwork and photographic records. You will see below a photograph of a document, a signing- on form featuring Jack Flynn and Donald Beale. This came to us from James Coleborn, great nephew of Jack Flynn.



# Between The Lines

Spring 2026



This item will be added to our ever-growing collection of work tickets, fault reports and wagon labels. These *bits of paper*, which could easily have been consigned to the bin, help to inform and bring to life the history of the railway.

We were very pleased to receive a large collection of photographs donated by Mac Hawkins, author of *The Somerset and Dorset, 'Then and Now'*. These photographs were submitted to his publisher for use in his book. See below a few examples of the photographs in the collection.



In addition, we were also given, by the daughters of the late Tim Hughes, a vast collection of photographs and negatives. Featuring many photographs attributed to W. Vaughan Jenkins. This collection is so huge that we are struggling to know how best to catalogue these photographs. We need, perhaps, a real steam locomotive enthusiast to

have a look at them. It is our intention to make these collections more available to our visitors.

Another important addition to our collection is a green Templecombe station totem gifted to us from the estate of the late Michael Squire. Other recent acquisitions are very varied, including a Station Master's jacket and a cheese can from Prideaux's Dairy. This year, we obtained a Western and Southern Region Notice titled 'Withdrawal of railway passenger services (7/3/1966)' in excellent condition. Space is now at a premium, so we are limiting acquisitions to items that relate directly to the S&D.

As you can see the museum collection continues to grow, reflecting the varied history of the Somerset and Dorset Joint Railway.

**Roger Taylor, Museum Curator**

## Membership Secretary required

Vivienne Taylor has retired recently as our Membership Secretary for family reasons and we now seek a volunteer for this role. In the meantime, please address any membership issues to John Baxter [jbsdjr@btinternet.com](mailto:jbsdjr@btinternet.com)

Vivienne has done an excellent job and we are sorry to see her go but understand the reasons why she has taken the decision. The existing system is based upon Excel sheets so we are now taking an opportunity to see whether the operation can be streamlined with an off the shelf system. Although Vivienne was local to Midsomer Norton it does not require someone who is local to the station. It does though require someone with internet access and willing to embrace a new membership system. The data we keep on all members has to be secure and we never release any data about you as a member to any third parties. If you are interested in taking on this role, please



# Between The Lines

Spring 2026

contact John Baxter as above to discuss the transition to any new software we obtain.

Over the years we have tried to encourage members to pay their subs by standing order and we hope that as many as possible of you who have recently been reminded of your April renewals will move to paying by that methodology from April 2027. The same is true of the September and January renewals as we operate on a three-part renewal process. We know that a significant number of you add to your standing order additional funds as a donation and we thank everyone who does this. Even though we have had a substantial donation as you will be aware, we have allocated this to current and future capital projects and not to cover the day to day running costs of our operation.

We should also like to point out that if you prefer to pay online via the Trust's website it is really appreciated if you ask the system to renew your subscription automatically each year and so long as you haven't changed your credit or debit card details then the system will carry out this renewal automatically. You can of course simply renew on an annual basis. We are still happy to accept cheques even though these are now fewer and fewer each year and we have to pay our bank HSBC a fee for every cheque transaction. And we do appreciate that some people still do not possess a smart phone or a computer.

Of around 950 members, around 300 are Life Members and from the 650 remaining members who pay annual subs one major running cost is insurance – this costs around £7000 per annum so nigh on 50% of the membership fee goes on that single element alone. Thus, the importance of other donations cannot be underestimated. Of the 300 Life Members, over 200, having paid their life membership never donate again so a very sincere thank you to the 100 who do so.

Just a final reminder to let us know if you change your home or email address or your phone number; every year when we send out email reminders about membership renewal, we invariably get a number of bounce backs because we haven't been informed of email address changes.

## Gift Aid

Gift Aid is an important income source for the Trust. When members join us using the membership form it has a gift aid section to sign up to. Many of you will be only too aware that the changes in taxation thresholds has meant that many of you who previously did not pay tax now find that you are starting to do so, especially pensioners. If you previously paid no tax but now do please let us know and we can claim Gift Aid on your membership fee and donations to the tune of 25p in the pound. Conversely, if you are lucky enough to move to paying no tax do let us know as we don't want to make a claim under false pretences. If you pay online, unfortunately, there is currently no facility for telling us whether we can claim Gift Aid so as part of the transition to a new Membership Secretary we will shortly be writing to those of you for whom we have no Gift Aid information to check, confidentially, on your tax status as we keep that information on our membership database. We will also be writing to those of you who have previously said you do not pay tax to see whether you are now. Regard it as one way to get back at the taxman but, if you make a self-assessment return, do ensure that you put down the details of the amount against which Gift Aid has been claimed as this will also help define your tax code for the better.

**Compiled by Roger Burfitt & Keith Turk**

**Somerset & Dorset Railway Heritage  
Trust. Spring 2026**