WELLS RAILWAY FRATERNITY

Newsletter No.217 - November 2026

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A busy scene at Bristol Canon Street station on Brian Arman's model railway.

See report on pages 8 and 9.

Welcome to Newsletter No.217

Containing the usual mix of meeting reports and interesting contributions from our members.

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Thank you to those who have contributed to this newsletter.
Your contributions for future editions are welcome;
please contact the editor, Steve Page
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2026 - 2027 Programme

All talks take place in Wells Town Hall, on the second Tuesday of the month.
Meet from 7.00 pm onwards for a 7.30 start.

For more details, contact Andrew Tucker 01749 830695.

2026

8 December	-	AGM and Quiz, *set by last year's winner, Andy Ball*

2027

12 January	-	Members' Talks Ex-LNER 3-cylinder 0-2-0s – *John Boxall* Railway Slides from the late David Fisher's collection – *Richard Blunden*
9 February	-	The Watercress Line Through Time – *followed by* Track Layout and Railway Systems Interface – *Matthew Savastano*
9 March	-	The Rail Accident Investigation Branch – *Richard Harrington*
13 April	-	Travels with my Camera – a Fifty Year Odyssey of Railway Photography – *Steve Flint*
11 May	-	Broad Gauge Journey – Part 2 – *Brian Arman*
Sat 14 August and Sun 15 August		Railwells Model Railway Exhibition 50th Anniversary Show

Wilfrid William Lacey (Wilf) **23rd March 1941 – 28th August 2026**

It is with great sadness we announce that Fraternity member Wilfrid William Lacey (Wilf) passed away on 28 August.

The Fraternity was represented at his funeral, which took place at St. Peters Church, Draycott, on 1 October.

Wilfrid William Lacey, affectionately known as Wilf, lived in Draycott and had a lifelong passion for model railways.
An enthusiastic collector, Wilf was something of a hoarder, and his home was filled with model trains, tracks and all manner of railway memorabilia. There was very little railway-related that didn't interest him!
Wilf was a longstanding member of the Wells Railway Fraternity, regularly attending meetings and helping at open days and exhibitions, including those held at Wells Town Hall.
His Tuesday evening meetings were a particular highlight of his week. Even when his health began to decline and he needed assistance to get out and about, Wilf continued to attend with the help of his carer. Sadly, during the last year or so of his life, he was no longer able to join his friends at the Fraternity, something he undoubtedly missed.
At Wilf's funeral, the following poem, written especially in his memory, was read. Its railway imagery, together with his love of gardening, made it a particularly fitting tribute to a much-loved local character.

Life is a Journey on a Train

Life is a journey on a train, a long, unfolding ride,
Where people board and people leave, travelling side by side.
Our parents share the early miles, the first to take their seat,
Until they reach their final stop, their journey is complete.
Then friends step on to share the car, to talk and pass the time,
Before they leave at different platforms further down the line.
But while the passengers would change and seasons rolled along,
His eyes looked through the windowpane, where his true heart belonged.
He found a world he knew: a beautiful English garden,
With flowers in every hue.
The foxgloves and the wallflowers, hydrangeas in the rain.
He knew the rhythm of the soil, the sweetness of the phlox,
The simple grace of lavender and rows of hollyhocks.
For him, the world outside was where he found his peace,
A quiet space of green and growth where outside noises cease.
He loved the patience of the craft, the turning of the earth,
The steady care it took to bring a summer bloom to birth.
The engine slows, the brakes take hold, his journey now is done,
He's reached his final station beneath a setting sun.
He's stepped out of the carriage now, into the quiet air,
To find in God's eternal peace, a landscape still and fair.

Rest in peace, Wilf — safely at the station at last.

Wilf will be fondly remembered by his friends at the Wells Railway Fraternity and by all who shared his enthusiasm for model railways.

Preserving, Maintaining and Operating Three Western Class Locos

– by Paul Finch **Tuesday 8 September**

The Wells Railway Fraternity started their new season of talks with a presentation by Paul Finch, assisted by Peter Bamber and John Kite, of the Western Locomotive Association on the subject of how they preserved, restored, maintain and run three examples of the much-loved Western Class diesel hydraulic locomotives.

However, firstly Railwells exhibition manager Chris Challis thanked all the Fraternity members who helped make August's Railwells model railway exhibition such a success, with many of the visitors including the chairman of The S Scale Society praising the quality of the modelling exhibited.

The WLA, custodians of three Western Class locos all now based on the Severn Valley Railway, celebrated their 50th anniversary in 2024 having been formed in Bristol in 1974. Starting with the low mileage early withdrawal D1062 Westen Courier and followed by D1048 Western Lady they were then asked by its owners to look after D1013 Western Ranger as well. In total there are seven of the class in preservation with four based on the Severn Valley Railway, one each on the West Somerset and East Lancashire Railways and one owned by the National Railway Museum but sited at the Didcot Railway Centre.

The Western Class were based on German diesel-hydraulic technology and were designed to haul express passenger and heavy goods trains in the West of England and Wales. They were the most successful class of diesel hydraulic locomotives in Britain, surpassing the two Warship classes. The design had the advantage of being much lighter than the previous type 4 diesel electrics of the English Electric and Sulzer 1-Co-Co-1wheel arrangements with the increased power and reduced weight giving a much better power to weight ratio, being more comparable with the successful English Electric type 5 Deltics. Several liveries were borne including, the perhaps most known, Maroon but also Green and Desert Sand before the British Railways Blue became the standard.

Powered by two Maybach MD655 engines, which go back to use in Zeppelin airships and battle tanks, coupled with Voith hydraulic transmissions, they had relatively short working lives on account of being non-standard with the rest of British Railways which favoured Diesel Electric designs of the Brush class 47 and the English Electric inspired class 50. They ended their time on second line duties including hauling stone trains from the local Somerset Limestone Quarries. The two ends of the locomotive were essentially mirror images of each other with use of two diesel power units giving a degree of getting home ability in the event of the failure of one.

The talk explained the difficulties in working on and operating main line diesel engines designed to be used on an everyday basis without the works infrastructure of the then British Railways. On railway locomotives many parts are heavy and are densely packed within the loco body, so removing and replacing components without the facilities of a major works can be very difficult. The modern purpose-built facilities now available at their Kidderminster base, which is shared with other diesel engine groups, contrast well with those rudimentary ones originally used at the Torbay and Dartmouth Railway, having 3 roads with pits and an overhead crane. Additionally sourcing spares for 60-year-old designs can be problematic but modern MTU538 V12 engines have been sourced which can be derated to the required 1350hp.

Preserving, Maintaining and Operating Three Western Class Locos – *continued*

With a rolling programme of overhaul and maintenance these popular locomotives can be seen operating with high reliability on the Severn Valley Railway and indeed came into their own during the recent heat waves when the use of steam locomotives was banned. In 2022 an availability of 97½ % was achieved followed by 100% in 2023. There is a continuous component overhaul programme to maintain the reliability by having replacements to hand ready for installation when required. One problem is that the original design for high-speed operation on the mainline is not compatible with a 25mph speed limit on a heritage railway so oil pumps are being fitted to maintain lubrication.

The presentation was well illustrated with may images of both the locomotives and its various components such as the preheaters needed to warm the power units prior to starting.
Since 2021 the WLA has tried to be carbon neutral offsetting the 13952 kg /year of carbon released into the atmosphere which is the equivalent of 62 trees with a planting programme which has now seen a total of 632 planted in Scotland.

Chris Challis called for a show of appreciation by the audience which was generously given.

(Resume by Andy Ball).

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The Golden Age of Steam – *by David Parker (Film Director)*

Tuesday 13 October

Film maker David Parker made a welcome return to give a presentation at the Fraternity October meeting on "How We made The Golden Age of Steam" films.

He explained that having been brought up in Crewe and then joining British Railways at the time of the electrification of the area he had a long-standing interest in the railway. As a freelance film producer, he would pitch ideas to broadcasters, which would usually be rejected! However, he had a good relationship with Richard Twine at BBC Channel 4. So, he suggested making three films about the birth of the Heritage Railway movement, using amateur footage taken on Standard 8 colour film, which coincidently had become available at a reasonable cost, for between three and four hundred thousand pounds. The advantage of using amateur footage was the cost which was low when compared with filmstock from places such as the National Railway Museum and other sources of professional film. However, when the proposal went up to Charlotte Moore who controlled the purse strings it was rejected. She did request a single film about canals which was then made, titled the "Golden Age of Canals" in 2011, for a 1-hour documentary slot on a Wednesday evening. This gained the largest audience for a Wednesday evening factual programme. As a result, Charlotte Moore then offered a single one-hour slot for a programme about steam railways which David regarded as insufficient to cover the subject properly. After some bargaining a deal for two programmes about the Golden Age of Steam for the price of one and a half was agreed! David explained the importance of "pre-titles", 90 seconds to two minutes at the very beginning of the film telling the audiences what they will be seeing in order to hook them into watching, because of course many may not know what the Talyllyn, Ffestiniog KVWR, or SVR or indeed heritage railways are.

The Golden Age of Steam – *continued*

David wanted to celebrate the people in the preservation of steam railways as their films were a major asset in the production of the films. The first film covered the Narrow-Gauge scene majoring on the Talyllyn Railway the pioneer preserved line which had formerly served the Bryn Eglwys slate quarry by transporting the slate down to Towyn for transshipment onto the GWR line, and additionally for passengers the village of Abergynolwyn at the head of the line. In 1950 the outlook was bleak for the railway as the quarry had closed, the railway was in very run-down condition and the owner, Sir Henry Hadyn Jones had died. However, the preservation movement was about to begin. A group of enthusiasts including Tom Rolt, a canal enthusiast, engineer and author met in Birmingham with a view to running the railway and encouraged by Sir Hadyn's widow in 1951the first preserved railway was born. The service being continuous from the railway's opening to the present day. The footage showed the volunteers striving to get the track into a serviceable condition to be a passenger tourist railway. Restoration of the rolling stock was also necessary as there was only one serviceable engine, No.2 Dolgoch.

Five years later further up the coast the Ffestiniog Railway, also a slate transporter, revival started in earnest with volunteers progressively re-opening the line from Porthmadog to Blaenau Ffestiniog. This was an even bigger job as the line had been abandoned overnight in 1946 and left to become derelict. Allan Garraway gave up a career with British Railways to become the new general manager. Volunteers cleared the line of undergrowth and restored locomotives and carriages back to usable condition so services could be re-started. There was one major problem though, the CEGB built a Pumped Storage Electricity scheme reservoir across the track bed blocking the way to Blaenau Ffestiniog. After much legal wrangling in the High Court compensation for loss of revenue was awarded and an alternative route around the reservoir was planned. This involved building a spiral track bed to gain height, the only one in Britain, and the blasting and digging of a new tunnel through the granite. This was known as the Deviation with the tunnelling, led by three Cornish mining engineers, Bob Le Marchant, Pete Hughes and Robin Daniel being done by volunteers, known as the deviationists. Not necessarily railway enthusiasts but people who liked the physical exercise and getting dirty and the sense of achievement. Eventually the line was restored through to a new station in Blaenau Ffestiniog. Other narrow-gauge lines covered included ironstone workings around Oxfordshire demonstrating how narrow-gauge railways had been an important part of many industries up until the fifties and sixties when the motor lorry became readily available.

The second film featured the Severn Valley and Keighley and Worth Valley Railways, pioneering the standard gauge volunteer led preservation movement where closed British Railways branch lines were similarly revived by volunteers. These much-loved lines had closed because lack of passengers had made them economically unviable as the local populace defected to the motor car and bus.

Much of the motive power for these lines came from a scrap yard at Barry Island in South Wales where over 200 derelict steam engines had been stored while the owner concentrated on the easier job of cutting up goods wagons. Standard gauge preservation received great publicity when the Lionel Jeffries film "The Railway Children" reached the cinema screens. The circle was completed when the second film was narrated by Jenny Agutter who starred in the Railway Children. The acquisition of a small LYR 0-4-0 Saddle tank engine no. 51218 by the KVWR and the restoration of Barry Island wreck GWR 2-8-0 no. 2857 were covered in some detail.

The heritage railway scene which has grown from virtually nothing in 1960, excepting the Talyllyn and Ffestiniog lines, now contributes millions of pounds to the National economy, providing leisure activity whether riding the trains or actively volunteering in many roles, not forgetting the jobs and apprenticeships at professional engineering companies who support the railways in tasks not readily able to be done by volunteers. The audience gave an enthusiastic show of appreciation at the conclusion of the presentation.

(Resume by Andy Ball).

Railways to the South – why some were and some were not ***- by Steph Gillett***

Tuesday 10 November

Local historian Step Gillett spoke about the development of the railway system in an area bordered by the south of the Midlands, Bristol and Southampton. Steph is a part time post graduate student at the Open University, is known as an author and speaker on the railways in the west and is currently researching a PhD in Geographical and Environmental Studies. His talk was lavishly illustrated with maps showing the routes of the proposed lines, some being copies of the originals created for the promotion of these lines.

By 1845 the Great Western Railway had reached Bristol in the north, the London and South Western Railway to the east had reached Southampton and to the west the Wilts, Somerset and Weymouth had reached Weymouth. However, there were no cross-country lines running roughly north to south connecting the midlands to the south coast where at Southampton there was the attraction of the docks with the promise of import/export business, particularly in coal. As a result, there were many proposals, (~1600!), to build lines to help fulfil that ambition and three hundred and fifty-seven which obtained their Act of Parliament but never the less were never built. Many were local lines which hoped to join up to produce a through route.

Building a railway was a difficult business as considerable costs were involved in just getting a Parliamentary Act approved and many of the proposals were locally born and just ran out of money. A major complication was the rivalry between the existing railways who sought to protect their territory from intruding lines. Particularly active in this respect was the Great Western Railway. Additionally, the Broad Gauge of the Great Western Railway was incompatible with the what was known as Narrow Gauge of other potential lines, preventing the through running of trains to and from the GWR. Eventually the narrow gauge became the Standard Gauge of today to which all new lines were built and the Broad Gauge lines were converted to narrow gauge. Narrow gauge then coming to mean lines built with a gauge of less than 4' 8$^{1}/_{2}$". Local landowners could be for or against a line being built across their property and could either refuse permission, or insist that the railway was invisible from their house hence demanding an expensive deviation from the planned route, or extract a high price for the land to be made available. This was all before a single rail was laid.

Eventually three cross country lines were built, the Somerset and Dorset Railway which became the Somerset and Dorset Joint Railway with a northern connection with the Midland Railway at Bath and in the south met the LSWR at Broadstone near Bournemouth. The Midland and South Western Junction Railway running from the Midland Railway at Andoversford, near Cheltenham, to Andover on the LSWR. The third line being the Didcot, Newbury and Southampton Railway running from Didcot on the GWR to a junction with the LSWR near Winchester. These lines were all heavily used during the two World Wars and suffered from heavy loading and minimal maintenance, so were worn out at the ends of the hostilities. All three did not really run through heavily populated areas with much industry so there was relatively little local traffic and once wartime military traffic had declined, combined with motor transport becoming much more available there was little economic reason to keep them running, so they all were closed. But, even here old railway rivalries were to fore as the former Great Western by now the Western Region of British Railways assumed control of the Somerset and Dorset an actively diverted traffic away onto their own lines.

The audience gave an enthusiastic show of appreciation at the conclusion of the presentation.

(Resume by Andy Ball).

Visits to Brian Arman's Model Railway *- by Steve Page*

At the end of his talk in May, Brian Arman kindly issued an invitation to Fraternity members to view his model railway "Bristol Canon Street". Accordingly, during July, several small groups took turns to visit.

Brian's model railway occupies one side of his garage, which he has converted into a well-appointed railway room. It is built to Scale Seven, with broad gauge (49mm), standard gauge (33mm) and mixed gauge track. Had the Great Western Railway been able to build a terminal station nearer to the centre of Bristol, as opposed to Temple Meads, this is what it might have looked like.

One end of the layout comprises a set of storage sidings, with the terminal platforms of Canon Street station at the other end; loco shed and various other facilities located in between. Brian built all the locomotives and rolling stock himself, along with the buildings and other details, to an extremely high standard, as can be seen from the photographs.

It is set in 1880; disc and crossbar signals are still in place, individually operated by Policemen. However, modernisation is approaching, and this system is about to be replaced. Posts are already in place to carry operating wires for new semaphore signals, which will be operated from something called a signal box.

Under Brian's instruction, we operated a sequence of trains to and from the station, and carried out shunting moves. The 3-link couplings certainly tested the dexterity and eyesight of the operators!

A cup of tea and a piece of cake rounded off an enjoyable afternoon.





Commented [SP1]:





Some more scenes from Brian's model railway.











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The Radstock Accident – 150 Years On ***- by Steve Page***

2026 marks the 150th anniversary of the Radstock Accident, which occurred on the Somerset & Dorset Joint Railway at approximately 11.20pm on Bank Holiday Monday 7th August 1876. Two trains met head-on between Wellow and Radstock on the then single line, near to Foxcote signal box. The accident is covered in detail in several books, but, briefly, lack of a robust system for ensuring only one train at a time on single line sections, and poor communications on the day were significant factors in the cause. Thirteen people were killed, mostly residents of Radstock and the surrounding area.

At 10.30am on the morning of 7th August 2026, members of the Shoscombe Local History Group gathered at the interpretation board which they had installed alongside the cycle path a few years ago at the site of the accident. The Somerset & Dorset Railway Heritage Trust from Midsomer Norton was also represented.

After a few words of welcome from Derek Withers of the SLHG and John Baxter of the S&DRHT, a short memorial service took place, led by the Rev. J. Balliston-Thicke.

The names of those who had lost their lives in the accident were read out.

Shoscombe Local History Group then placed a wreath on the interpretation board.

Amongst those present were descendants of William and Louisa Golding, whose children were brought up by relatives following the accident.



The Radstock Accident – *continued*

A few relics of the accident exist. Radstock Museum has on display a fragment of glass from one of the carriages, and a funeral card for James White, one of the casualties. Another casualty, Elizabeth Edgell, is buried in Clandown churchyard, near Radstock; her grave marked by a small tombstone near to the entrance. A small box with a hinged lid, reputedly made of wood from one of the wrecked carriages, is in the S&DRHT museum at Midsomer Norton South station, on loan from the S&DRT. On the lid is a very faded painted inscription:

IN MEMORY OF THE RAILWAY COLLISION RADSTOCK. August 7th 18 AD 76.







Not far from the interpretation board, on the opposite side of the cycle path, just within the tree-covered area where the sidings once were, there is what appears to be a small cairn built of brick and stones. Maybe someone's way of marking the spot where the collision occurred?

Further reading:
The Somerset & Dorset Railway, by Robin Atthill, P122-125.
Radstock Coal & Steam, Vol 1, by Chris Handley, P56-59.
Life on the Bath to Bournemouth Line, by Colin G Maggs, P142-146.
Somerset & Dorset Railway Trust "Pines Express" No.305, Summer 2022, P25.

Jonathan Jones Pratt 1983 -2026 ***- by Andrew Tucker***

I was surprised and saddened to hear that Jonathan Jones-Pratt died on 11 October He was the speaker at our November 2021 meeting. The title of his presentation was "My Life in Transport" and what a lot JJ-P has achieved in that time. His father's interests in both railways and buses meant that JJ-P saw preserved steam locomotives and buses up close at an early age. At the age of 16 he was so disappointed when his father sold his restored bus, JJ-P saved up and bought his own having cycled some distance with the cash to complete the deal.

Starting his career at Quantock Transport and Veolia Cymru he gained technical and business experience. The closure of Veolia Cymru was an incentive to go self-employed. In 2011 JJ-P established Crossville Motor Services in Weston -super-Mare. The firm operated commercial and contract routes alongside a heritage fleet. As well as Crosville, JJ-P, with his entrepreneurial spirit, started "Somerset Passenger Solutions", to provide bus services for workers to and from the Hinkley Point Power Station construction site. One of the conditions of planning permission was that they had to bus workers to and from the site to limit traffic problems. This became a multi-million-pound business which he sold to First Bus in 2018.



JJ-P's railway interest also continued. GWR 4-6-0 number 4936 Kinlet Hall was running on the West Somerset Railway and JJ-P was one of the directors of the owning group. With extensive repairs needed in 2016 JJ-P bought out the other directors and put the work in hand. In 2019 he purchased BR 0-6-0 pannier tank number 9466 which had been restored by the late Dennis Howells. JJ-P had his first steam loco driving experience as a youngster on miniature railways and he went on to develop his footplate skills on various preserved railways.

In 2018 JJ-P made the transition from footplate volunteer to chairmanship of the West Somerset Railway. Inheriting a severely divided organisation with a £1.25M wage bill and a £3M turnover, on the edge of administration, JJ-P used his business skills and railway knowledge to good effect. The necessary restructuring proved to be effective and JJ-P still occupied the chairman's role at the time he became ill.

Companies House lists Jonathan 's involvement with a wide range of businesses, mostly connected with transport, but he will mainly be remembered for his 'hands on' approach and energy to get things done.

The Gartell Light Railway – the last public open day - ***by Steve Page***

The Gartell Light Railway held its last public open day on Sunday 25 October. Owned by John and Christine Gartell, the 2ft gauge line first opened to the public in 1991, running for around three quarters of a mile along the course of the Somerset & Dorset Railway just south of Templecombe.

Throughout the day, three trains were in use, with departures every 25 minutes. Intending passengers formed long queues, awaiting their turn to travel. The railway will continue to operate for private events from time to time.







The final departure was double-headed.

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