



JOURNAL OF THE
KENT & EAST SUSSEX RAILWAY

200th
Years of Train Travel
Since 1825

Tenterden Terrier

Spring 2025

Number 156

New Chairman Interview
Simon Marsh Valedictory
Visitor Numbers 2024
Matters Financial
Headcorn Junction

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FRONT COVER
Sun and silhouette at Rolvenden.
(Liam Head)

BACK COVER
Autumn at Cranbrook Road.
(Phil Edwards)

JOURNAL OF THE KENT & EAST SUSSEX RAILWAY



The Wealden Pullman approaches Northiam on 27th October 2024.
(Ian Scarlett)

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Editorial

New Faces

Welcome to the first *Tenterden Terrier* of 2025. The K&ESR may have no notable anniversaries of its own over the next 12 months, but the national celebrations for 200 years of rail travel are upon us; and to mark this we have changed the logo at the top right of this journal's front cover. There are other, greater, changes to note as well, not least the start of weekend services during February instead of March which has been the practice hitherto. As you may know,

we also have a new Chairman (Derrick Bilsby) and a new Finance Director (Ian Legg). Both feature in items elsewhere in this issue of the *Terrier*. We are also pleased to publish a piece by the General Manager, not having heard from him for a while.

The Annual General Meeting in November saw veteran volunteer Philip Shaw step down from the role of Trustee and Derrick Bilsby elected to the main Board. Julie Wilkinson has since been co-opted as a Director of trading subsidiary Colonel Stephens Railway Enterprises. These changes are also to be found in the usual listing on page 47.

Nick Pallant



(Phil Edwards)

FROM THE CHAIR

As I get my feet under the desk following the Christmas break, I have been looking back at everything we have achieved in our 50th Anniversary year. To name just a few: two successful galas; gaining a prestigious Tripadvisor Award; the innovative collaboration with artist Mr Doodle (now a 2025 HRA marketing award finalist); being part of Tenterden's Gold Wilder Kent Award thanks to the work of our Sustainability & Environment Group; and the naming of 73128 *Kent & East Sussex Railway* as part of a special event staged jointly with Rother Valley Railway to dedicate the new turntable at Robertsbridge at the start of our 50th Anniversary gala weekend. And, of course, we have just put to bed another Santa Special season, also celebrating its 50th anniversary.

There were also several new activities which I am sure the General Manager will be writing about further on in Lineside News.

The most significant thing that took place during the special event at Robertsbridge was the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding between Rother Valley Railway Heritage Trust, Rother Valley Railway Limited and the Kent & East Sussex Railway. This paves the way for us to work in partnership to deliver the project to construct and operate the missing link between Bodiam and Robertsbridge.

As construction work begins in earnest this year, the prospect of reconnection with the national rail network at Robertsbridge is now firmly on the horizon for 2028. This is a potential game changer for our heritage line, but it also brings into focus the importance of ensuring we are in a strong position to take advantage of that opportunity.

As the incoming K&ESR Chairman it is my mission to improve our resilience, so my starting point is to address the current financial challenges that we, along with all heritage railways and indeed most other tourist attractions, are currently having to deal with.

The K&ESR continues to face a difficult and challenging environment created by the pandemic, the war in Ukraine and the inevitable downturn in the economy which has put up the cost of everything. This has hit the railway's finances hard. This is also true of family budgets, which

have been stretched – meaning they have less disposable income to spend on leisure activities.

We have therefore been in uncharted waters: our passenger levels, although improving year on year, continue to fall short of pre-pandemic ticket sales by about 20%. We find ourselves in a better place than most, but we are still facing strong economic headwinds and will be for the foreseeable future.

This situation has been further compounded by the recent above-inflation increase in the minimum wage and the National Insurance changes announced in the budget, which reverses the cash improvement we made in 2023/24.

Therefore my objective, and that of my fellow Trustees and Directors, must be to provide a resilient operational plan, which also considers staff and volunteer wellbeing. However at its heart will be a resilient and sustainable financial foundation upon which we can move forward with confidence towards our extended railway in 2028.

To achieve this we need to balance the books, so that we can start to rebuild our cash reserves for much-needed capital investment. This is not going to be easy to achieve, and will require changes to the way we finance and operate the railway. Some changes may not be very palatable, but are necessary if we are to preserve the achievements of our founding fathers and our subsequent achievements over the past 60 years.

The current business model has served us well for many years but has inevitably become out of date because customer expectations have changed. Our visitors want more than just a train ride, and the uptake from our partnership with Fox & Edwards has confirmed this. Many other things have changed too, making the model no longer fit for purpose, and requiring us to change if we are to survive for another 60 years.

The Board has therefore made a start by reviewing and revalidating our 2024 budget, which considers the operating season from November 2024 to October 2025. This is being done to ensure that we have captured all the changing costs, and to revise income expectations based on data from the previous year. It is important that we all understand that we cannot spend more than we receive in revenue.



Derrick Bilsby (far right) speaking to volunteers at Bodiam.

(Bryan Atkins)

A key operational change is the move to a different timetable, with not all trains going through to Bodiam and some services only operating to either Wittersham Road or Northiam. This change has been brought about by passenger feedback and our experience of accommodating the Fox & Edwards customers on our timetabled services. Their activity-based business model generated additional ticket sales of almost 10% in 2024. We have used this information to plan our own activity-based timetable and ticket pricing for the 2025 season. Fox & Edwards will be continuing to contract with us, and in fact will be expanding their activity-based products on the line.

The next major change is the expansion of our catering offering; this will see the introduction of a further named train, The Rother Valley Limited, to complement our premier service the Wealden Pullman. The train incorporates our recently refurbished restaurant car *Diana*, which will offer at-seat breakfasts, lunches and afternoon teas on selected services. Again, I expect that the General Manager will expand on this another edition of the *Terrier*.

Overarching this, the Board has set up the 'Project 28' group, with a remit to grow our revenue between now and 2028 by £500,000 in real terms. It will explore how we can expand our on-train activities to better meet passenger

expectations, and will feed into our 2025/26 programme and all subsequent operational plans and budgets. The aim is to establish an activity-focused timetable and ticketing options. The group has already agreed that the 2026 timetable will be product-based, enabling us to continue to expand the current market while identifying new marketing opportunities. It will scope this through dedicated market research which will enable us to gauge the market size and the level of penetration we think is possible. We will follow this with data and business analysis so that we can establish and understand the level and type of marketing necessary to achieve a return on the investment being made.

There have been several recent changes to the personnel of the boards of both CSRE and the K&ESR. These are as follows:

Julie Wilkinson – co-opted to CSRE at the November Board Meeting, she brings commercial and marketing experience to the Board. She was subsequently co-opted at the January Board Meeting as a Trustee. Julie remains a Director of CSRE.

Patrick Favell – co-opted to CSRE at the November Board Meeting, he remains Chairman of the Project Assurance Committee. Patrick's co-option strengthens the Board in the areas of programme and project management.

Philip Shaw stepped down as a Trustee at the January Board Meeting, but remains a CSRE Director.

Geoff Crouch stepped down as a Trustee at the January Board Meeting, but remains a CSRE Director.

Kevin Bulled stepped down as a Director of CSRE at the January Board Meeting.

As the new Chairman I would like to thank those who have served as Trustees and Directors and recently stood down from the Board, for the contribution they have made to the railway over many years and for the time and effort they have put into navigating our railway through some difficult and challenging times.

I would also like to take this opportunity to welcome both Julie Wilkinson and Patrick Favell to the Board. I look forward to working with them both as we work to restructure the railway to a more sustainable and resilient future.

I am pleased that we will not be losing the wealth of experience that Philip Shaw and Geoff Crouch have in the operation of our railway, because they are both to remain Directors of CSRE.

The Board has also asked Julie Wilkinson to become the champion of our Communications, Marketing and Events group. She will be supporting Caroline Warne, our Marketing & Sales Manager, Heather Packham, our Visitor Experience Manager and Alison Miles, our Press Officer, in this important area. The marketing budget for 2025 has also been increased based on analysis of the successful marketing strategy adopted for the 2024 Santa Special Season which saw us attract many new customers.

I have therefore asked our Volunteering Committee to seek to find people with market research and business analysis skills from among our membership and volunteers. These skills are needed to collect and analyse the market data for 'Project 28'. This will enable the Board to make informed decisions about new activity products and the type of timetable necessary to deliver the market penetration that will deliver controlled growth and increased market share, which in turn will improve our revenue and cash-flow.

There are a few other initiatives being worked up which will reinvigorate many aspects of the railway's operation; I will expand on these in later editions of the *Terrier*. In the meantime I

want to express my sincere gratitude and thanks to our members, and especially our paid staff and volunteers who have worked so hard to make our 50th Anniversary year so successful. We are also fortunate to have strong support from our town and borough councils who have sent us these New Year messages, which add their thanks to mine.

Cllr Sue Fergusson, Mayor of Tenterden:

"As Mayor of Tenterden, I am proud to recognise the Kent & East Sussex Railway as a vital part of our town's heritage and a cornerstone of our local economy. The railway's contribution to tourism and business cannot be overstated, drawing visitors from near and far while enriching the vibrant character of our High Street and surrounding area.

"As we embark on a year of celebration for Rail 200, marking 200 years of passenger rail travel, we are reminded of the transformative power of railways to connect communities and drive growth. The prospect of reconnecting the K&ESR with the national rail network by 2028 is an exciting step forward, promising even greater opportunities for Tenterden and the wider region.

"I would like to thank the members and volunteers of the K&ESR for their dedication and passion, which ensure that this historic railway continues to thrive as both a cherished attraction and a catalyst for progress in Tenterden."

Cllr Heather Hayward, Cabinet Member for Tourism, Culture, Policy and Performance, Ashford Borough Council:

"The Kent & East Sussex Railway is the 'Jewel in Ashford's Tourism Crown', attracting thousands of visitors to the borough each year and contributing significantly to the economic prosperity of the area.

"However, it is also so much more. In showcasing the very best of heritage railways in the UK, it shines a light not only on this part of Kent, but also on the wider region too. The railway is deservedly known for its excellent visitor experience, and this is thanks to the amazing contribution of its many dedicated volunteers and staff who go above and beyond to create those very special and all-important visitor memories.

“We are therefore enormously proud to have the K&ESR in the borough. We were delighted to be part of the railway’s 50th Anniversary celebrations and now look forward to celebrating two more major events together: firstly, this year marking 200 years of passenger rail travel and then in 2028, celebrating the landmark reconnection of the heritage line with the national rail network.”

So, yes, our environment remains difficult and challenging, but together we will bring about the necessary changes to our railway that will deliver resilience and sustainability for many years to come! To quote the BBC South East report on our New Year’s Day Whistle Up event: we are “A railway that celebrates the past, now building a new future”.

*Derrick Bilsby
Chairman*

FROM THE OFFICE

You can all feel proud of what we achieved together last year for our 50th Anniversary. It was a huge milestone, and none of it would have been possible without the dedication of working volunteers and staff.

Now, as we begin 2025, I’d like to share how we’re planning to tackle the challenges ahead and ensure a bright future for our railway.

The Year Ahead

This year is all about building resilience – making sure that our railway is sustainable by being strong enough to face the challenges of rising

costs, changing visitor expectations, and our goal of connecting with Robertsbridge by 2028. To do this, we need to focus on three key areas:

1. Attracting More Visitors

We’re aiming to grow visitor numbers by 10% this year. That means a mix of existing tried and tested events such as the 1940’s Weekend, car and bus rallies, building on newer events such as Steampunk and Star Wars, and special trains for bird watchers. We’ll further develop our partnership with Fox & Edwards from Cream Teas to Character Days.



The last of the light.

(Robin Coombes)

We're planning a 'Midgets of Steam' Gala and a celebration of the 25th Anniversary of opening to Bodiam. There will be new events such as Cocktails on the Move, Antique Valuation Days and, we hope, a 'Gaming Train'. All these are designed to bring in families and enthusiasts.

We will continue to welcome school groups with our 1940s Evacuation Days and meet our educational objectives with Junior Engineer Days. We're also improving the visitor experience with better catering, including the new Rother Valley Limited dining service, and enhanced on-train options. We are also making more paid footplate experiences available. All this will go to strengthen the bottom line.

2. Careful Spending and Smart Investments

We can't spend more than we earn. We will be working strictly within budgets so we're reviewing everything – from timetables to ticket prices – to make sure we're running efficiently. We are reviewing all our plans and schedules, and we are (for example) investigating ways we can share more within the 'Southern Six' so individual efforts are not duplicated. Every decision is being backed by data to target the right audiences. We will watch the pennies and ensure every pound is spent wisely.

3. Strengthening Our Team

We can't achieve any of this without the help of volunteers and staff. More importantly we know just how stretched and under-resourced we currently are, and how reliant we are on just a few key individuals. We are focusing on recruitment to widen and extend the pool of volunteers, so we are asking more people for more help.

We also need to invest time for training, focusing on safety and your wellbeing. This includes occupational health and other initiatives to ensure everyone is supported and fit for their roles.

Staying Safe and Working Together

Safety is our number one priority. Whether it's maintaining equipment or looking after each other, we must ensure *nobody gets hurt*. If you see something that isn't right, speak up. Together we can prevent accidents and keep everyone safe.

Communication is just as important. If you have concerns or ideas, please talk to the right person directly. Social media is great for promoting our railway, but it's not the place to solve internal issues. Let's work together with respect and kindness to keep our community strong.

Inclusivity and Practicality

We want to make the K&ESR a welcoming place for everyone, but there are times when safety or practical considerations mean we can't say yes to every idea or request. When this happens, we'll always aim to find solutions that work while staying true to our priorities of safety and sustainability.

Looking Ahead

This year will bring changes. Some will be welcomed; others might feel challenging. But every change we make is carefully planned to secure the future of our railway, and I will always explain 'the why' and 'the how'. Mistakes may happen, but we'll learn, adapt, and keep improving.

Thank you very much for everything you do. Whether it's running trains, greeting passengers, or helping behind the scenes, your contributions matter.

Together, we can make this railway not just a piece of history, but a place where people feel inspired, connected, and excited to return for years to come.

Here's to a successful 2025!

Robin Coombes
General Manager

MOTIVE POWER

Loco Report

Happily we are able to begin this report with news of the return to service of one of our steam engines. However, before you get visions of 4253 or *Maunsell* thundering up Tenterden Bank, we feel we ought to clarify that the engine concerned is *Marcia*! Having passed all necessary

inspections, *Marcia* hauled her first scheduled passenger services on our railway on 1st January, hauling two 4-wheel coaches on shuttles between Tenterden and Rolvenden. Owner Andrew Hardy was the driver for the day, with Chris Stuchbury firing. This service proved so popular that at least one shuttle left early, due to there being no more room on it!



Maunsell taking shape at Rolvenden. (Liam Head)

The news from Rolvenden mostly surrounds 4253 and *Maunsell*. We don't want to steal the 4253 group's thunder, so we will leave it to them to give you the tidings. Maunsell is looking a lot more like a loco again, having had its boiler clad, and cab and side tanks re-fitted. There is still a lot of work to do before it will be running again, but the end of the overhaul is now in sight.

The news regarding the Terriers is a bit of a mixed picture. *Knowle* is available for service, subject to us treating it with proper care. However, *Bodiam* is no closer to a return to service at present. The bent connecting rods were sent off for testing and straightening and came back with the shafts of the rods relatively straight, but the big-end housings were not at right-angles and also there is a twist on the shafts. The rods are wrought iron, so were X-rayed to check for the integrity of the material. The post-straightening tests showed that there were more cracks forming, which indicated that the rods were unlikely to tolerate a further attempt to straighten them. At a meeting with the insurers in

late December it was agreed that new rods will have to be made. We have sourced some more drawings for the rods and, once they have been approved, we will need to have new ones forged and machined. It is anticipated that this will take several months to complete. (Thanks to Patrick Favell for this information.)

There is also news regarding home-fleet Austerity *Northiam*. We have received the following from Rolvenden Steam Enterprises (RSE) and Road and Rail Steam Services Ltd. (R&R): "RSE Group have decided to sell locomotive 25 to R&R. One of the main reasons for this is our desire to see the engine receive a timely and thorough overhaul when it comes out of service in 2027. It is our wish that 25 is preserved in a proper operational manner so that it can continue to give pleasure to all that are associated with it. RSE have a good working relationship with R&R and we have been impressed by the quality of the maintenance carried out on their locomotives. It is ironic that our 25 carried the name *Sapper* when in military service. It should therefore fit nicely into R&R's fleet with *Swiftsure* and *Sapper*."

Northiam, *Swiftsure* and 76017 performed all Santa duties for us, and remain available for service. We understand that 76017 will be with us until Easter at least, and possibly for longer (depending on agreement with its owner).

Regarding the diesel fleet the big news is that, following the spectacular repaint of D2023 which took place earlier in the year, an equally superb job has now been done on the Class 108 DMMU. It broke cover at the end of January, in time for the February half term running, and looks amazing. Well done to all involved.



The newly painted DMMU at Wittersham Road.

(Jack Marlow)



Liam Head (left) and Richard Moffatt taking a well-earned break in Rolvenden Mess Room.

(Robin Coombes)

Work is also being done to return the Ford diesel to service. The Ford is being worked on by Richard Stone, who is running the project to return it to operational condition. He has carried out work to make the loco waterproof (as much as you can with a near-100-year-old diesel), and the air tanks have been taken off, cleaned, tested, and refitted. Currently the loco is waiting for space to become available in either Rolvenden Works or the CSS to enable Richard to continue with the overhaul. Obviously the work to prepare and maintain the service fleet takes priority, hence having to wait for space.

Currently Richard and one or two others are the only resources working on the loco. If anyone else can spare some time and energy, Richard would be pleased to 'set you to work'. The restoration of the loco will have two phases: the first is to return the loco to a serviceable condition; the second, longer-term phase will be to restore it, as far as is practicable, to the original condition it was in when it arrived at the railway. (Again, our thanks to Patrick Favell for this information.)

4253 Locomotive Company – Kelvin Williams

Our 12th AGM was held in Tenterden buffet on Saturday 18th January. The meeting was opened with the reading out of the names of shareholders who had sadly passed away in the last 12 months, followed by a minute's silence. The shareholders attending then received a financial

report, and a detailed engineering report covering what has been achieved so far, and what still needs to be done to finish the locomotive.

The boiler is now in the frames, with the locomotive moved into the engine shed, where we can get cracking on preparing it for a steam test later in the year. Thanks to being in the shed, we will be able to have access underneath to work on connecting all the pipework etc. in a dry (and warm) environment during the winter months. We will also be able to complete the construction of the crinoline cage, ready to receive the insulation and cladding sheets.

Work is 'almost' complete on the building of the tender for the Maunsell Locomotive Society's Q class loco based at the Bluebell Railway. All that remains to do is the fitting of some minor attachments such as the water level indicator, and it will be ready for collection.



Assembly progressing on 4253. (Kelvin Williams)

GWR Railcar W20W – Chris Mileman and Neil Edwards

Work continues apace on W20W, with significant progress having recently been made.

The most obvious advance since the previous update is the completion of the Robertsbridge-end cab and roof dome metalwork. This achievement is thanks to the skilled work of our contracted metal fabricator and welder, Tom Newell. Of course this meant even more countersinks to press into the panels, fill, rub down and paint, but it is so great to see the 'face' of the railcar back again, after an absence of over 30 years. The windscreen glazing will follow soon but the remaining windows, glazed panels and internal surrounds are now in place in the small saloon.

In the luggage van, all of the windows are now in place and the 'obsolete' switches, controls and gauges of the old heating boiler have been reinstated. Although, in the main, these will no longer be functional, they have been installed to retain the original fittings and therefore preserve the look within the vehicle. The luggage compartment is also ready for its Marmoleum (lino) flooring to be laid. Three wheelchair restraint kits have been acquired and are ready to be fitted. Sadly the door through into the large saloon is too narrow to accommodate a wheelchair. However, ramps are being acquired to access the luggage compartment, so that our disabled guests will be more than comfortable listening to those beautiful AEC engines while watching the countryside roll past from the luggage van. It is also planned to provide seating within the luggage compartment for those accompanying the wheelchair passengers.

In the large saloon the heating pipe covers have been painted and refitted. Four sections were found to be missing or damaged, and these were replaced by 3D printed versions. Now painted, you would not be able to spot the difference. The brackets and supports for the luggage rack have been fitted and we await delivery of the nets to complete these. Lots more carpentry has resulted in all the seat cappings and door/window surrounds being completed.

A specialist flooring contractor has been engaged, and the Marmoleum will soon be fitted throughout the vehicle. However, the small saloon is to be carpeted to enhance its finish; the design and style of the carpet is still being



The bogie going back under the Railcar.
(Neil Edwards)

considered. Once this has been agreed it is hoped that this will quickly follow the Marmoleum installation. Once the flooring is completed we can begin to fit the re-upholstered seating.

Marmoleum flooring is also to be fitted in both of the driver's cabs. Following advice from the contractor, the cab floorboards have been overlaid with thin ply. This will provide a better surface for the flooring, reducing the risk of cracks and breaks. Dave Dury, a Railcar Team member, undertook the difficult task of fitting the ply around all the cab fittings and has achieved an excellent finish.

A little more out of sight, work continues under the vehicle and on the mechanicals. Our 4253 colleagues helped and arrangements were made for one of their members, Henry Mowforth, to undertake the fabrication of a new header tank for the south side radiator. Following its delivery the new header was swiftly fitted to the radiator. The north side radiator header was remade and fitted some years ago. Now both radiators have been re-fitted and are fully plumbed in, bringing closer the time when we will be in a position to run both of the engines again.

In line with the plumbing of the cooling systems, work has continued on both the vacuum and air control pipework. This is a difficult and uncomfortable job due to access issues. Therefore, many thanks must go to Mike and Steve Artlett who have undertaken all these tasks over a number of weeks.

Following the discovery of some issues with the generators, a contractor has been identified who may be able to both service/repair them as well as supply replacement regulators. This is to be progressed over the next few weeks.

Apart from the cab metalwork, another major outstanding problem to be resolved was the bogies, in particular the wheelsets. The potential issue with regard to the wheel profiles was explained in the last issue of the *Terrier*. This series of railcars was originally fitted with tyres conforming to the GWR standard locomotive – thick flange – tyre profile. This profile is subtly different from the usual P1 profile found on most vehicles.

Following a lot of measuring and deliberations it has been decided that the railcar will be fit to run without any further work being carried out to the wheel profiles. It is recognised that there may be a little increased flange wear and some negative impact on track profile but, in view of the expected limited usage of the vehicle, these issues will be lived with in the short to medium

term. There are no safety implications, and our ICP and the infrastructure ICP have both signed off this conclusion.

At the time of writing we were awaiting a date when the bogies could be replaced under the vehicle enabling it to be lowered from its stands. This was expected to be achieved before the end of January.

Following a lot of fettling and adjustment of the window surrounds by our own and C&W's carpenters to ensure a flat fit for the glass, Tom Newell's attention has turned to the Headcorn-end cab metalwork. This is already beginning to take shape nicely.

It really feels like things are all coming together now, but there is still plenty to do before W20W is back in service. External painting will be a considerable job so, please, if you can come along and offer your support the team would be very grateful. Look in at C&W any Wednesday or Thursday.

OPERATING

Signalling – *Tony Ramsey*

The autumn running seemed subdued this season, but the pace certainly picked up with the arrival of the Santa Specials. Thank you to all who helped by undertaking a box turn, a crossing turn or a lamping turn (or even all three!).

There were no signal box passing out turns during the period covered by this report, but we congratulate the following on passing out as Crossing Keepers: Neil Pepper (Cranbrook Road); Andy Hunt, Aodhan Kavanagh, Dave Yates and John Patrick (Rolvenden); Dave Yates (Northiam).



Signalman Cathy Crotty prepares to exchange tokens at Wittersham Road.

(Alan Crotty)

Sadly we have to say farewell to Tenterden Signalman Keith Dorey (who has had to withdraw due to ill-health), Crossing Keeper Hugo Baxter (who has moved to Canada) and Crossing Keeper David Houghton (who has decided it is time to retire). We thank all three of them for their much-appreciated contribution to the department.

We were sorry to learn of the death of former Signalman Peter Landon, whose Celebration Service was held in Faversham in October. Clive Norman writes: "At that service I was pleased to be reminded of his many and varied interests which included the game of cricket, many forms of music (jazz being a particular favourite) and all the various aspects of country life, which goes a long way towards explaining why he was so content to spend time at Wittersham Road and never expressed a wish to move on to another box. It was always a pleasure visiting Peter to chat about rural life, about which he was extremely knowledgeable. At the wake following the service I was given the opportunity to say a few words regarding Peter's life and times on the K&ESR, which were well received by the many friends and family present. It is planned to place a memorial plaque in Peter's memory in the dedicated garden at Northiam Station in due course."

We were also sorry to learn of the death in November of another former Signalman, David Manger. [A tribute to him appears on page 40.] In addition to his roles as a Signalman at Tenterden Town, Rolvenden and Northiam, the packed church at his Celebration Service in Frittenden was reminded of his many other interests such as travel, walks in the countryside and ornithology, but especially bell ringing.

Station Masters – Geoff Colvin

2024 drew to its close with the frenetic activity that inevitably accompanies Santa services – nine days during which the team toiled to ensure safety, smooth operation and that our visitors left with memories of the right kind. 177 different shifts were covered by Station Masters, Booking Clerks, Ticket Inspectors and Platform Assistants. These included regulars, some who are usually involved in other roles but enjoy the special atmosphere that the event creates, and some newcomers gaining their first experience of volunteering at the K&ESR.

It was particularly satisfying to see that 52 individuals were involved, a 25% increase in comparison with 2023. This reflects a gradual



Staff for Santa services on Christmas Eve.

(via Geoff Colvin)

growth in numbers through the year, which will hopefully stand us in good stead in the future as the steady change from offering a 'day out on the train' to a 'family event' continues to gather momentum, requiring more people and more flexibility. It also meant a little less arm-twisting and pleading than previously to get an adequate level of cover – a very welcome development.

Following a chance observation by an eagle-eyed Murray Motley on his travels in Scotland, the trial introduction of new platform steps at Tenterden has been a successful one. They provide a solid base for boarding and dismounting the train and are particularly helpful at the Headcorn end where the height of the platform is lowest. Appreciated by families with younger children and some of our less mobile visitors, they have the benefit of not risking damage to the paintwork of the rolling stock. Considering how smart the DMMU now looks following the care lavished on it by Jack Marlow, this is a real benefit.

As 2025 began two of our long-serving Station Masters, Derek Smith and Ivor Davies, came to the view that the time was right for them to hang up their whistles. We are sad to see them leave the team, thank them for their years of service, and hope to see them visiting.

In the closing stages of 2024 we welcomed two more recruits to the ranks of qualified Station Masters. Roy Cooper – known to many up and down the line as one of the most regularly spotted TTIs – and Robert Palmer both passed out at Tenterden. Welcome aboard both.

In December we received the sad news of Brian Thompson's death. Previously Chief TTI, he was a regular on weekend services and would always find time for a chat. Often this included an account of how in earlier years he had successfully turned down exhortations to join the Station Master ranks, so included in this piece in an honorary capacity.



Derek Stroud (left) and James Darling (right) with Tom Baker at Tenterden.

(Derek Strand)

Booking Office – Derek Stroud

Following Peter Morgan stepping down as Chief Booking Clerk I have now taken over the role. I am one of the ‘newbies’, having joined the K&ESR as a volunteer in April 2023 as a Platform Assistant and got really hooked. The phrase B&B had a new meaning: no longer Bed and Breakfast, the first task of the day was now Bogs and Bins! Both need checking to ensure that the station is in a presentable manner for our customers.

Many a happy hour has been spent helping people on and off the trains and generally being an ambassador for the railway, hoping that my interaction will in some small way encourage return visits. In July 2023 I began training in the role of Travelling Ticket Inspector, and following a successful accreditation was allowed out on my own. For my first few trips I was a bit apprehensive. Could I remember whose ticket I had checked? Was I charging the correct fares?

Could I answer the multitude of questions that our travelling customers would ask? I soon learnt to listen very carefully to what Colin, the regular on-train guide, was saying and to try and recall some of that information when asked. It's fascinating who you can get to encounter, and on one occasion I had the pleasure of meeting and speaking with Tom Baker (aka Dr Who).

I still hadn't escaped fully from the B&B aspect. I soon learnt that as a TTI you also collect the rubbish on the train and on the last run are responsible for all the toilets being flushed! Christmas 2023 was my first Santa experience. The days all seemed to blur into one, but it was great to see all the happy customers, which made the long days worthwhile.

At the 2024 pre-season Team Meeting I volunteered to help out in the Booking Office and enjoyed many a happy hour in the warm and dry while my colleagues were out in the wet. Peter Morgan announced that he was standing

down, so I once again ‘volunteered’ and was duly appointed as Chief Booking Clerk. With a successful Santa period behind us I am now looking forward to a busy 2025 season.

Being at the K&ESR has enabled me to meet and enjoy the company of a large number of volunteers and paid staff, who all work together with the single common goal of ensuring the future of the railway. If you are at a loose end and need something to keep you occupied then please come and join us. There are a wide range of roles – there is bound to be a slot where you can fit in.

Travelling Ticket Inspectors – Murray Motley

I wonder, does the number 4407 mean anything to any readers out there? If it does, it’s likely you were once involved in booking offices and on-train ticketing on the main line railway. This was the catalogue number of the British Railways Excess Fare and travel ticket pad: BR4407. Used by ticket collectors and tickets inspectors all over the network, but now largely usurped by smart phones and other clever devices. It has pretty much been consigned to the history books.

Until now! How so? Last year we realised we were running out of supplies of the pads we use to issue tickets on our K&ESR trains. Stocks of the pink ‘raffle tickets’ for first class supplements were running low too, so it seemed a good time to move ourselves forward (backwards?) into the second half of the 20th century and modernise our processes.

And so it was that, during the autumn of 2024, a

small group of TTIs worked together to design a new all-in-one ticket, together with updated supporting documentation. Having printed some sample pads, we then trialled it all during the New Year train service. As you’d expect, a few tweaks have been needed, but at the time of writing we’re waiting for delivery of the final tickets while busy refining the document to go with it.

How will this benefit our railway? Well, for one thing we’re doing what we should be doing and giving a nod to railway history by calling these new tickets ‘KESR4407’. A conversation piece when on the train, and a chance to tell our customers about some railway history. Financially, the new tickets will have a space for Gift Aid – so when the transaction value is more than a pre-set limit, we can potentially claim 25p in the pound through the government scheme. That means a £29 ticket is actually worth £36.25 to the railway – an extra £7.25.

If this all seems a little trite and boring, then maybe so. However, it is important to us in the TTI cohort; and I’m very proud that we’ve designed and introduced something that makes our job much easier, doesn’t involve the internet, bar codes, social media or such like, shows the customers a bit of history and perhaps most important of all, brings more money into the fare box. And we really need that.

Aside from that, we’re looking forward to another great year in the team; four more people waiting to be trained and lots of exciting events to get involved in. Don’t forget to stop by and ask to see our new ‘KESR4407’ tickets when you’ve five minutes to spare...



Any colour you like, as long as it's blue... 08359 and 20087 at Rolvenden.

(James Palk)

Forestry & Conservation

– Steve McMurdo

We have been involved with two major safety-driven clearance projects over the winter weeks.

The first involved the stretch of line on Tenterden Bank between the foot crossing at the cemetery and the second one further up the bank by the home signal. When heading towards Tenterden, footplate staff had reported the overgrown conditions on both sides of the line were causing difficulties in the early sighting both of the home signal itself, and also of any persons either on or about to use the public crossing. This was clearly an unacceptable situation and in need of action.

The works initially involved attacking the fierce brambles and other undergrowth on both sides of the line (always a less than popular job with the team...) so that miscellaneous shrubs and small trees could be accessed and cut back to open up the site for clearance. Once done, attention could then be paid to individual branches from larger trees, some of which had become intertwined with the railway's overhead communications cables. Towards the end of our works we liaised with our footplate colleagues,

who welcomed the vast improvement but politely identified a couple of additional branches which we then despatched to complete the visibility enhancement of this area to their satisfaction.

The second project was at Wittersham Bank and was not entirely dissimilar in that it was also safety driven. In this case, the worksite stretched from the level crossing gate up to and beyond the summit of the gradient. Here there are signal cables at ground level for a significant distance and these need to be kept clear of choking undergrowth, to enable routine safety checking and also for the smooth operation and pulling of the cables by the signaller. Additionally, a safe and clear walkway is needed for staff dismounting from trains and walking along the line to reach the gates when the signal box is unmanned. Again, major removal of undergrowth, strimming of grass and attention to trees and shrubs was required.

No one is quite sure how this arose, but the Forestry team has traditionally taken responsibility for the organising and management of Tenterden Station car park over the three days of Tenterden's annual November Christmas Fair, an event otherwise totally unconnected with the K&ESR. This is held each



76017 leaving Tenterden on a dining train. This photograph gives an indication of how dense the lineside growth had become in this area.

(Robin Coombes)



The newly cleared lineside on Tenterden Bank.

(Alan Fagg)

year up in the town itself, at a time when no trains are running and our site would otherwise be empty. We offered all-day parking to the public at a modest charge, and almost £5,000 was collected this year by the team, who ran the operation from early opening until late closing on each of the three days. Despite experiencing a very mixed bag of weather conditions, including fierce winds, torrential rain, low temperatures and even some sunny breaks, it's too good an opportunity to miss to raise much-needed funds.

The coming of spring will hopefully mean the ground alongside the line will dry out – we have plenty to do once we can access various locations.

Permanent Way – Paul Jessett

We have experienced a busy winter period. In November we firstly started the work to refurbish number 5 points at Northiam. Although this point only serves the siding, it is still in the main line and is exposed to all of our normal traffic. This originally was going to be part of the Permanent Way Institution track work challenge from 2024, but due to the heavy rain it had to be postponed. Most of the materials were on site (or so we thought). The intention was to change one or two of the point timbers, but we ended up having to change the majority of them, due to the poor condition identified through our inspections. These are heavy beasts, and again we were thankful for the plant that the P.Way Department has access to.

Initially all the point drive rodding and tie bars had to be disconnected, and then both sets of switch and stock rails were changed out. These were re-seated into their respective chairs then, once keyed up, were removed as a whole unit to the cess. The old point timbers were then removed and the area levelled. Once this was

compacted the new timbers were laid out in position for the iron work to be re-laid on top. Once everything was in the right position, the chairs were re-drilled and screwed to the new timbers. Thankfully, only one or two of the old fittings had to be cut off, so most were changed like-for-like. The point was then reconnected, and finally ballasted and tamped. Not a lot when said quickly, but in effect a week's work.

The following week we changed the first panel of track on the Wittersham side of Northiam level crossing. I mentioned in the last Lineside News that East Sussex Highways had attended to some drainage overflow problems that were causing the road debris to be washed onto the track, contaminating the ballast and clogging our track drainage. As this work was successfully completed, it allowed us to dig out the first panel of track, dig out all the silt from the track formation and relay with fresh ballast. The eagle-eyed amongst you will notice this has been re-laid in flat bottom track. This gives a far better connection to the flat bottom rail that is embedded in the concrete slab of the level crossing. We were also able to get better access to grade off the cess area and improve the train crew walkway.

Just before Christmas we spent some time recovering redundant materials on the extension at Junction Road. Things are starting to progress, and we will soon be being asked to assist with the track laying. If you are interested in getting involved with this please speak to either Frim or one of the team. Many hands make light work; however please don't just turn up, as there will need to be a briefing, as for obvious reasons we still need to tread carefully.

We are currently in the final planning stages for our next re-lay, gathering and delivering materials to site – but more on that next time.

Could you help to produce the *Tenterden Terrier*?

The volunteer presently responsible for the layout and design of the *Tenterden Terrier* is retiring after the July 2025 issue. This is a vital role and the Editorial Team urgently needs someone to take on this work.

Do you have some printing experience? Have you done some desktop publishing? Could you help set up the pages for the magazine? Ideally we would like somebody with a sound knowledge of English and a good eye for detail in design. Although not essential, some experience of journalism or creative writing would be helpful.

The editorial side of the *Terrier* is conducted on a working-from-home basis, with colleagues collaborating via e-mail.

If we cannot recruit anyone for this role it will be necessary to pay for this service – an additional expense which it would obviously be best to avoid.

The present arrangement has saved the K&ESR a great deal of money.

For further details please e-mail Nick Pallant, Editor, *Tenterden Terrier* at terrier@kesr.org.uk

GROUPS AND ASSOCIATES



Chris Jackson, the new Museum curator, in the company of Gazelle.

(Alison Miles)



The Reverend Sandra Marsh leads the Remembrance Service held at Bodiam Station, attended by children from Bodiam and Staplecross Primary Schools, and local residents. The Cavell van was open for the children to visit.

(Robin Coombes)

Bodiam – Malcolm Burgess

Inevitably winter weather restricts the activities that can be undertaken outdoors, so the emphasis recently has been on jobs that can be done inside. The ladies' toilets have been having particular attention again, and signs and other removable items are being freshened up.

The reintroduction of services earlier than usual this year means that we will have less uninterrupted time to prepare for spring, but we hope that the 25th anniversary of the reopening of the station can be marked in some meaningful way. The interior paintwork of the Cavell Van has been refreshed during some useful time in Carriage & Wagon.

The group were able to welcome the new Chairman for a discussion in the camping coach, kindly facilitated by Bryan Atkins. Bryan is also liaising with the Sustainability Group about how the coach and the station can be used to promote the wildlife initiative along the line.

At the end of February the station will see major activity by the Permanent Way team for a week to re-lay the loop line ready for the summer season.

Gardening – Veronica Hopker

I am pleased to report that the creation of a wild flower garden is slowly progressing. David Holman, who joined Tuesday and Gardening Groups

recently, sought advice from his neighbour in Northiam regarding the correct way to start a wild flower area. His contact kindly visited our garden and said we appeared to have made a good start. We will, therefore, continue with our plan.

To date we have three garden areas. Two patches are in the Memorial Garden and the other is a small area lineside next to the Picnic Garden. We intend to see how we progress these areas and possibly create more if they work well.

We do have a problem with rabbits, which seem to be rather intelligent. We managed to keep them out of the Memorial Garden by doubling the fencing wire around the whole area with the help of the Tuesday Group (thanks Robin). However, they have cleverly found that if they dig under the fence they can then dig up into the small garden on our side and have a field day chewing everything they like the look of! Sadly we are not sure what we can do to keep them out. The farmer used to have a cull every so often, but he has not had one recently.

However, we will press on and see how things go. We have planted more than 60 daffodil bulbs in the lineside patch and Memorial Garden, and a few by the fence on Platform 2 at the top of the footpath. We have also included a few small iris bulbs in the Memorial Garden. A handful of seeds were also broadcast. We now wait to see what results we get over the next month or two.

The winter weather has now set in and seems to be extremely wet and windy. Gardening is out of the question, so we turned our attention to wielding a paint brush instead of a gardening fork and helped put a coat of emulsion on the interior walls of the Tuesday Group 'cottage'.

Our next activity (Tuesday Group and Gardening Group) was to help with the Santa Specials which went extremely well, and everyone thoroughly enjoyed themselves. It was a pleasure to be able to interact with our passengers and to receive their comments regarding the whole event, which went very well. Our organisation team really excelled this year, and need a big pat on the back!

Eventually we plan to plant suitable areas of the large car park, but we are limited at present in view of equipment and materials passing through the area to assist with track repairs and improvements.

Tuesday Group – Graham Hopker

At the end of November and into the beginning of December the weather was cold and windy, so it was decided to emulsion the inside of Cottage

No.1 at Northiam which was started by Trevor. The remainder of the Group discussed the clearing and removal of the vegetation at the rear of the two cottages and the ultimate rebuild of the rear of Cottage No.2, which is completely rotten. Work will commence in the New Year, weather permitting. This will involve the provision of a retaining wall behind both cottages. A trench has already been dug behind No.1. Unfortunately the sleepers provided proved to be too dilapidated, so a decision was made to acquire some more in a better condition.

Prior to Christmas, platform lights and a large Christmas tree, together with decorations and lights, were put up next to and around the station building.

Sadly Robin Ball, a stalwart of the Tuesday Group, decided he had to retire due to ill health and the long drive each week from Surrey.

Tuesday Group again worked on the Santa Specials providing refreshments to the passengers while a magician and Father Christmas provided the entertainment (although the lively beers caused a few laughs!)



Northiam leaves Rolvenden as 76017 rests on shed.

(Robin Coombes)



Members of the Tuesday Group with the newly extended Memorial Wall.

(Steven Bunn)

On our return after Christmas, the Christmas tree and decorations were removed and the tree was sent for recycling. The wood required for the repairs to Cottage No.2 was delivered.

Unfortunately numbers have been depleted due to the ill health of some members of the team. However we were very pleased to have Dave Brown back, following his absence while he was caring for his wife.

With the passing of time it has become necessary to erect a third sleeper wall in the Memorial Garden; in addition one of the existing walls had started to move and needed to be pulled vertically. A difficult job was tackled using muscle, pulleys and a tree. A brilliant job carried out by just five of the Tuesday Group!

Unfortunately the water table in the Memorial Garden is very high at the moment so any ground work will have to wait until the water recedes. New paving slabs will be laid when the area dries out.

Wednesday Working Group – John Holland

Can you believe how quickly 2025 has arrived and the speed with which the days are passing? We've had dark mornings and evenings, and weather that has been awful to say the least.

Now that the Christmas extravaganza is over, it's time to think about the coming months, and how we will go forward as a volunteer group within the K&ESR. The biggest job for us was to dismantle the community marquee, move it to its new position with the extra frame included and put a floor down within it, which became a long job. This is not a task for the faint hearted, and something we cannot do every five minutes!

We are saddened somewhat that Brian Richards, the Infrastructure Manager, has departed his position, but will work a sort of freelance job for the railway as and when required. This will, of course, put extra pressure on the lead volunteers to keep the show rolling, along with financial backing from the board. The WWG is not a civils group, although we have been known to participate in huge jobs which might be mistaken by other groups!

We have prepared a huge job list for ourselves which involves Tenterden, Wittersham Road, Rolvenden and outstanding signal post painting. Some of the shabbier parts will be repaired, reconstituted or renewed.

The signal box and station buildings at Tenterden are there to be continued as soon as possible; and much is still to do, as we have always believed that first impressions sell a ticket.



The big lift – 4253 gets its boiler.

(Liam Head)



Swiftsure at Tenterden Town prior to working a Santa Special on 15th December.

(Phil Edwards)

As light railway as it gets! Marcia with vintage carriages nears Tenterden Town on 1st January.

(Phil Edwards)



K&ESR heritage era pioneer Marcia at Rolvenden on 1st January.

(Phil Edwards)





No.25 Northiam climbs Wittersham Bank with a Santa Special on 22nd December.

(Phil Edwards)

Also on 22nd December, No.76017 and Santa Special in a scene reminiscent of steam on Coastway West in the early 1960s.

(Phil Edwards)



Railcar at Tonbridge



Phil Evans, through his employment as a civil engineer with British Railways, had access to Special Traffic Notices, and so noted the delivery plans for W20W to Robertsbridge in April 1966. Phil took these photographs after the Railcar's arrival at Tonbridge from Reading. It was about to set back into the West Yard to await the possession of both lines to enable this out-of-gauge vehicle to pass through the Restriction 0 tunnels.



Valedictory: Simon Marsh on Stepping Down as Chairman



(Alan Crotty)

Now I have joined the select ranks of the K&ESR Ex-Chairman's Club, the Editor has asked me to pen a few thoughts for the *Terrier*. This is not going to be an account of the past six years, but rather some reflections borne from experience.

The heritage railway sector continues to go through difficult times, and we all know the reasons – COVID in particular was a big jolt – but overall, the sector is responding increasingly well. Most railways are beginning to wake up and smell the coffee, and up and down the country structures are being modernised, personnel refreshed, and activities put on a more professional and sustainable footing. Crucially, these activities include those not directly related to engineering or railway operating. If we don't manage ourselves as businesses, albeit unusual ones, and get the essential enablers right, we are in trouble.

We are adapting to developments in the market. A long train ride is no longer sufficient. The future lies in innovation, ringing the changes, and the provision of memorable experiences. You'll see in the magazines and in social media that there is much more of this around.

There is more co-operation and mutual assistance and, led by the Heritage Railway Association, we are far better at lobbying, and at making our collective voice heard where it matters. Much of this goes on behind the scenes, but it is essential. The sector is maturing; this is good, and needs to continue.

But the times are still dangerous. There will be failures, and near-failures. Resilience in the face of a sudden need for major expenditure is patchy. The price of survival will be professionalism, eternal vigilance and the ability to respond, quickly, to events and situations both external and of our own making. A greater infusion of new, and younger, blood at the senior levels would help.

So what does a successful heritage railway need? The list is a long one, and we will all have our strongly held views. Here is my selection.

- It needs to have in its leadership positions at all levels a balance of age, skills, personality types and experience, including professional experience and qualification. Ideally some – not all – of these will not be traditional railway enthusiasts. Too much of the same leads to groupthink and opportunities being missed.
- There needs to be a balance between long-serving, experienced (but possibly a bit stale and tired) people, and those who are fresh, energetic, and possessed of new ideas (but possibly a bit green).
- All must be capable of working together and, where necessary, of disagreeing well in the interests of the organisation. Energetic doers and more laid-back strategists and thinkers are both necessary; the task is to blend these attributes while maintaining cohesion. This isn't easy in a complex organisation and an environment where strong personalities have historically been the norm.
- At corporate level, the organisation must understand its risks and risk appetite, and be able to manage and mitigate them. It should have a clear understanding of where it wants to go, and this must be realistic and achievable. There will never be enough

resource or bandwidth to do everything that is desirable or even necessary, and leaders must appreciate this and plan accordingly. Everything takes longer, and is more expensive, than planned.

■ Given that a railway will be lucky if its farebox covers its running costs, it must ensure that big projects have separate funding plans, and that where possible big renewal or maintenance items are planned and provided for. Budgeting must be cautious and conservative. All income and expenditure must be monitored in real time, and adjustments made where necessary. Ideally there will be a contingency reserve, or at least an idea of what would be done in a financial emergency.

■ Its governance structure will be simple, with no overlapping companies, associations or trusts. Some of our friends are currently moving in this direction.

All of this is easy to say, but doing it is a challenge.

I think we on the Kent & East Sussex are reasonably well placed, and we are capable of learning from experience. I also believe that the recent changes on the Board help us to build on the past few years and increase the momentum.

My top tips from personal experience:

■ The importance of selecting, nurturing and empowering the right people. You can't do everything yourself.

■ You will get tired, and from time to time you will need to ease up on the oars. This is one

reason why having a supportive team is so important.

■ Nothing is ever as good or as bad as it seems at first sight.

■ The completely unexpected will always be just round the corner.

■ There always seems to be more than one version of truth. Don't rush to judge or take hasty action.

■ There are more things in life than the railway.


■ Ideas are easy; it's the implementation that is difficult.

■ Remember that we are a family, with all that implies. Consensus might not always be possible, but we need to strive for it.

■ And finally, the importance of knowing when to step back and hand over the reins.

Will the Kent & East Sussex Railway survive, succeed, and become a must-visit tourist attraction between Tenterden and Robertsbridge? Yes, if we all keep our eyes on the ball, it will.

My first job on the railway was serving in the shop, before the introduction of decimal coinage, when it was in a dusty Pullman car alongside the platform at Rolvenden. One of my last acts as Chairman was attending a heritage railway reception in the House of Lords. That just about sums it up, for all of us.

Our new Chairman, Derrick Bilsby, has my very best wishes, and my full and continuing support. 

A Date For Your Diary

The **Annual General Meeting** of the Kent & East Sussex Railway will be held on **Saturday 8th November 2025** in Saint Mildred's Church, Tenterden. Formal Notice will be made available to members in due course and it is presently intended to enclose copies with the July issue of the *Tenterden Terrier*.

John Cobbett
Company Secretary

VISITOR NUMBERS 2024

Results for 2024, as in previous years, are derived from the MERAC tills installed at Tenterden, Northiam and Bodiam stations. The results show an overall improvement on 2023 as shown in the table, which sets out what is effectively our four train operating market areas for our services: Regular Trains, Santas, Special Trains and Pullmans.

Regular Trains

The 2024 results for the Regular Train traffic showed an overall increase of about 1,450 passengers over the corresponding number in 2023.

Considering individual months, the February 2024 half term was disappointing compared with 2023 but was more than compensated for with the combined March and April figures – largely as a result of Easter occurring early in 2024.

Of particular note is the month of June, with an increase of over 2,000 passengers. This growth is largely a result of the Robertsbridge gala, where passengers were able to buy through tickets from Tenterden to Robertsbridge Junction and back for the first time since the line closed in the 1960s (albeit with a replacement bus service to Bodiam!). Included in this offering was a shuttle to Northbridge Street behind No.70000 *Britannia*, making it an attractive day out for passengers and enthusiasts.

| Visitor Numbers 2023 | | | | | | |
|----------------------|----------------|--------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|---------------|
| Month | Operating days | Regular passengers | Santa specials | Special trains | Pullman trains | Total numbers |
| February | 7 | 2,450 | | | | 2,450 |
| March | 1 | 280 | | | 30 | 310 |
| April | 18 | 5,780 | | | 350 | 6,130 |
| May | 16 | 6,560 | | | 400 | 6,960 |
| June | 18 | 4,860 | | 80 | 260 | 5,200 |
| July | 22 | 6,360 | | 90 | 510 | 6,960 |
| August | 28 | 9,480 | | 240 | 380 | 10,100 |
| September | 18 | 5,580 | | 220 | 420 | 6,220 |
| October | 12 | 2,660 | | 330 | 560 | 3,550 |
| November | 1 | | 100 | | | 100 |
| December | 13 | 1,000 | 12,600 | | 230 | 13,830 |
| January 2024 | 1 | 270 | | | | 270 |
| Totals | 155 | 45,280 | 12,700 | 960 | 3,140 | 62,080 |
| Platform tickets | | | | | | 2,330 |
| Total visitors | | | | | | 64,410 |

| Visitor Numbers 2024 | | | | | | |
|----------------------|----------------|--------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|---------------|
| Month | Operating days | Regular passengers | Santa specials | Special trains | Pullman trains | Total numbers |
| February | 7 | 1,920 | | | | 1,920 |
| March | 5 | 1,560 | | | 190 | 1,750 |
| April | 19 | 5,050 | | 30 | 470 | 5,550 |
| May | 23 | 5,860 | | 110 | 180 | 6,150 |
| June | 19 | 6,900 | | 60 | 260 | 7,220 |
| July | 22 | 6,550 | | 160 | 430 | 7,140 |
| August | 28 | 10,780 | | 160 | 320 | 11,260 |
| September | 16 | 4,990 | | 80 | 470 | 5,540 |
| October | 11 | 2,120 | | 200 | 490 | 2,810 |
| November | 1 | | 780 | | | 780 |
| December | 12 | 470 | 11,550 | | 200 | 12,220 |
| January 2025 | 1 | 355 | | | | 355 |
| Totals | 164 | 46,555 | 12,330 | 800 | 3,010 | 62,695 |
| Platform tickets | | | | | | 2,330 |
| Total visitors | | | | | | 65,025 |

For most other months the passenger traffic was similar in both years.

Santas

The Santa traffic was lower in 2024 by about 350 passengers. It was decided to operate one fewer Santa day in 2024 (nine instead of ten), but all seats were sold by late November and all trains were full on all the days operated. The final total passenger count was 12,330. As in 2023 we again operated a 'Quiet Santa' day in November for disabled children; this generated just under 800 passengers and again received many compliments from parents and others.

Special Trains

This is the smallest of our market areas but has the potential for further exploitation. Special Trains include Real Ale, Fish & Chip Supper and the Fright Night in October. It has the

attraction of usually being run by a set of carriages which has already operated three trips earlier in a day and may be considered to be at marginal cost. Passenger numbers were a bit down compared with 2023 but generated useful revenue.

Pullmans

The Pullmans are our flagship service, with a deserved reputation for premium class travel and fine dining. Passenger numbers were slightly down on 2023, but all trains operated were fully booked and the service remains a substantial source of revenue for the railway.

In summary we have been able to increase our passenger traffic and visitors year on year particularly in the Regular Trains market area – our core business. We should go forward with optimism in 2025. 🚂



Flagship of the fleet: The interior of Pullman car Theodora.

(Ian Scarlett)

Matters Financial

Firstly, I would like to introduce myself as the K&ESR's new Finance Director. I have been involved with the railway for many years – I nearly qualify for my 50 years service award! More recently I have been a Board member since April 2007, and actively involved with helping manage the railway's financial affairs for many years as a member of the Finance Committee. Many members will also see me out and about as Controller, Signaller or Guard.

I would at this point wish to thank Geoff Crouch, who has stepped down as Finance Director due to ill health. He has had a very firm hand on the company finances and brought his 'real world' experience of running his own successful business. We are not losing his invaluable assistance though, as he will continue to be involved in helping me with financial matters, as does his predecessor Phillip Shaw. I consider myself very lucky to have such experience to hand.

Financial discipline

As I write this, we are in the midst of the financial audit. Before the formal numbers are finalised, it is clear that the K&ESR made a loss in the last financial year. Additionally, the cash reserves have been reduced, so – as the Chairman has said in his piece – we must pay very careful attention to our performance this year.

Budgets for the 2024/25 year have now been agreed. It may be less than departments would wish to spend, but we must all live within our means. Whatever your views on the government's policies, the reality is the cost of 'doing business' keeps on increasing, and our staff costs are rising faster than our income. The impact of customers having reduced discretionary spending power has meant we have taken a very prudent view of income growth.

Elsewhere there are details of some of the initiatives that are 'in train' to move the business into areas that hopefully will prove more profitable.

Don't panic! We will still run trains, they will still be steam hauled, we will still have helpful and engaging staff to guide our customers, and the volunteers who run it all will still have fun!

What will change is the development of products

that offer a package experience – not just a train ride, nice though it is. The Rother Valley Limited dining on the A set is one example, as are wine and gin tasting trips.

How we did in 2024

Although we made a loss last year there was much success. We had over 1,000 visitors to our Diesel Gala and this made a net contribution of more than £4,000 after all operating and event costs. The 50th Anniversary celebration gala in June had 2,500 visitors and made a net contribution of more than £34,000.

Our 1940s event and associated children's evacuation experience had nearly 1,900 visitors making a net contribution of £21,500. Steampunk had been increased to a two-day event, but did not reach expectations with only 770 visitors as well as other group parties, bringing in a net contribution of £11,000. This year this will revert to a one-day event.

The Autumn Wildlife & Country Fair weekend also saw 700 visitors and made a net contribution of £6,600. The Halloween half term had an experimental Witches & Wizards on train entertainment over two days which did well for a first-time event, generating an extra 400 visitors and making a net contribution of £2,000. One to develop further. At the other end of the scale, a mini event celebrating Star Wars saw 180 passengers more than normal, earning an additional £6,500 for minimal cost.

Of course, these events are dwarfed by Santa. The 2024 season results are still being finalised, but we carried 12,900 passengers and made a net contribution of over £300,000.

I cannot end this section without thanking our partners Fox & Edwards who work with several preserved railways in the UK in marketing catering offers and character days. They like us and we like them! Their feedback is that we are one of the best railways in the country for friendliness of staff, delivery consistency and commercial helpfulness. We think the near £100,000 net contribution very helpful!

In a future magazine I will go into the other areas of the business – station catering, on-train dining and the shop.

Looking forward

The job of Finance Director is simple. Only allow spending when we can afford it!

However a lot of background work goes into planning the service, events, projects and changes to costs. We must develop the products we offer, mostly to non-rail enthusiasts who want to have a good value day out. This requires investment in products, people and hardware.

That all requires money of course. So apart from the day-to-day income and expenditure monitoring and control, I must try to find time to work out how that cash can be released.

Fundraising

As was once said by former head of the Strategic Rail Authority (remember that?) Richard Bowker, there are only two sources of funding for railways – the passenger and the government.

For the K&ESR of course it's visitors and supporters – either enthusiasts like readers of the *Terrier* or other organisations that can see the worth in what we are trying to achieve.

We have a very effective Fundraising Working Group that follows up many potential grant givers. However, the membership can also support – either through regular donations, one-off gifts or by remembering the railway in your will.

Finally

I am determined that the K&ESR will survive and prosper. But in order to achieve that, we need everyone's help – whether that's by volunteering, by giving money or by just telling friends and family about us and encouraging them to come visit.

There is something for everyone to enjoy now, and we hope for years to come.

Ian Legg



Ever popular, ever profitable. 76017 with a Santa Special on 14th December 2024.

(Phil Edwards)

Our New Chairman

Derrick Bilsby succeeded Simon Marsh as Chairman of the Kent & East Sussex Railway on 30th November 2024. Tony Ramsey interviews Derrick for the Tenterden Terrier.



Simon Marsh (seated left) hands over to the new Chairman, Derrick Bilsby (seated right).

Other Board members and officers are (left to right) Deputy Chairman Andy Papworth, David Nibloe, Robin White, Safety Director Neil Sime, Company Secretary John Cobbett, Paul Vidler, Kevin Bulled, Assistant Company Secretary Dave Raimbach, Matt Hyner, Finance Director Ian Legg and Phillip Shaw.

How did you first become involved in the K&ESR?

I cycled to Rolvenden after school one day in 1968, liked what I saw and decided to volunteer. I joined the P.Way department. In those days, of course, the track was all overgrown!

What has been your subsequent involvement?

In the early '70s I became the Traffic Co-ordinator, helping to get everything ready for reopening. In the mid-'70s I arranged special events to celebrate the 75th anniversary of the original opening in 1900. These included our first-ever Pullman hot meal and the Queen Mother's visit as Lord Warden of the Cinque Ports. Together with the late Mark Yonge I

arranged several money-raising occasions; one, with vintage cars and traction engines, led to the formation of the Steam & Country Fair. The peak came in 1979 when we persuaded NatWest to sponsor us bringing the NRM's *Rocket* to run up and down the hill. We attracted 12,500 visitors and took so much money that the local branch had to open specially, as we didn't have space to store the cash! Subsequently I became P.Way Manager. Later I took a break from active volunteering to concentrate on my family and career, but more recently Simon Marsh persuaded me to return to assist with Norman Brice's fundraising working party, which has helped with the restoration of the GWR Railcar and the Wealden Pullman's new kitchen car.

Tell me about your career.

I joined BR and started on the platform at Hastings, also learning basic routines like ticketing, shunting and being a box boy. I would have liked to have gone into signalling, but there were no vacancies, so I took the clerical exam and became a train planner in the Divisional Office at Beckenham. Later I became the Kent Coast Controller, and then a Regional Controller at Waterloo. As privatisation approached I promoted the concept of Service Delivery Centres, effectively writing myself out of a job! I was then asked to move into IT, where I suggested using a joint venture company to handle stock maintenance systems. Then, after a career of 33 years, I left to set up ITAL (with five colleagues) to provide data services to the railway. That is now a multi-million pound company, of which I am CEO, serving both train and bus industries. I currently restrict myself to two days a week, although I have a full-time Managing Director and 45 staff.

What will be your main priority as Chairman?

To stabilise the finances. The whole leisure sector has been affected by the pandemic, the war in Ukraine and a struggling economy. We are still only 80% back to where we were pre-Covid, so we must build a resilient and sustainable position. Our railway has always had a bumpy ride, but our forefathers had a vision, and we owe it to them to face our problems and resolve them. We need to operate not only as enthusiasts but also as a business: the challenge is to bring the two elements together, and that means being prepared to change.

What is your vision for the future?

I see it in three stages.

(i) Short-term (the next 12 months). We must stabilise our finances through a combination of cost controls, seeking targeted funding support, and introducing an enhanced marketing strategy to increase our visitor numbers. By leveraging our existing strengths – such as volunteer dedication, support networks, goodwill and community value – we can weather current constraints.

(ii) Medium-term (the next two years). We must build resilience by improving our operating model, having more structured decision-making, enhancing our visitor experiences (so that they are relevant to today yet preserve our unique heritage), collecting better data on visitor trends,

and developing targeted volunteer recruitment. This will position us for growth.

(iii) Long-term (by 2028). We must thrive and grow. I want to see us evolve to a wider heritage attraction with a stronger financial basis. We must balance our opportunities for growth (such as the extension to Robertsbridge) with the need to maintain the character of the Colonel Stephens light railway as the cornerstone of our identity.

How will all this be achieved?

I am developing a 'Project 28' Group, to be headed by Neil Sime and Julie Wilkinson, to focus on generating revenue, managing costs and engaging volunteers. We have got to get out of our silos and work together. Today's visitors don't turn up for just a train ride – they expect more. Therefore we will develop new timetables with new on-board activities to attract non-enthusiasts. Our catering offer will be refreshed, focusing on the trains rather than the buffet. The A Set will become 'The Rother Valley Limited' and (thanks to kitchen car Diana) will offer breakfasts, lunches and teas on the train. The aim is to increase revenue by £0.5m by 2028.

I have also set up a Communication & Marketing Group, led by Julie Wilkinson supported by Alison Miles, Caroline Warne and Heather Packham. It is essential that our decisions are based on hard facts, not anecdotes. We will use market researchers and business analysts to investigate subjects like the size of the market, the extent of our penetration and what we need to spend to achieve growth. These data will lead to improved budgeting. At the same time the Volunteering Committee's remit will be extended both to identify and encourage new (especially younger) volunteers and to be responsible for the wellbeing of existing staff and volunteers.

I would also like to create groups to cover issues relating to rolling stock, locomotives and catering – all stressed areas at present. For example, our existing rolling stock maintenance cycle is based on a BR standard for coaches which covered 600 miles per day rather than per year. If we develop a new, mileage-based regime, we should be able to reduce the cost of maintenance by 50% over three years. On locos, we need to find the correct balance between hiring-in (which is expensive but includes a 40% contribution towards their long-term maintenance) and using the home fleet (where we need the staffing capability to provide the maintenance).

In summary, we have been losing money and need to reverse that. I aim to balance the books within the next two years. Once we are living within our means, we must seek to increase capital. Initially we will seek external funding, but the longer-term aim must be to generate a profit so that we are not dependent on grants. This calls for realism: some decisions will be unpalatable, but we can't live in the past. If we don't adapt, all that our predecessors have done will be wasted.

What is the timescale for reopening to Robertsbridge?

The initial focus will be on infrastructure (to reduce the risks from inflation). The line has already been fenced, the damaged bridge repaired and the trackbed as far as Salehurst is accessible. Funding is secured and work has started on Robertsbridge station. Other construction work will begin this year (2025) with track being laid over the B2244 in the summer and over Northbridge Street in the autumn; the A21 crossing will follow next year. All construction work should be completed by the

end of next year. (For those at Bodiam who are worried, may I stress that the site will not be developed but kept as it is.) In 2027 we will run ghost trains to test the infrastructure and provide staff training, with a public opening in 2028. The aim throughout has been to design a railway (i) which is a cost-effective operation, (ii) where maintenance is mechanised as far as possible, and (iii) which is resilient against flooding.

Not everyone is in favour of the extension. What reassurance can you offer to those who fear it will prove to be a millstone?

I am an optimistic pragmatist. The original vision – 60 years ago – was for a railway from Tenterden to Robertsbridge. Much has already been done to achieve that, and I don't want to scupper those efforts. We have worked closely with the RVR to ensure our processes and procedures are on a sound footing with protections for both sides. Ultimately I believe that Robertsbridge will give us a new market (and we will work with Southeastern to integrate our timetables as far as possible) as well as a new supply of volunteers. Thus, I am optimistic that it will be a success. 🚂

**KENT & EAST SUSSEX RAILWAY 300 CLUB
PRIZE WINNERS**

September 2024

| | | | |
|------|---------------------|----------|------|
| 1st | Jeremy Nelson | No. 424 | £160 |
| 2nd | Clifford Colmer | No. 653 | £140 |
| 3rd | Lionel Marchant | No. 1040 | £120 |
| 4th | Mrs Christine Rigby | No. 1086 | £110 |
| 5th | Lionel Marchant | No. 1049 | £100 |
| 6th | A C Thatcher | No. 119 | £90 |
| 7th | Howard Wallace Sims | No. 235 | £80 |
| 8th | Ian Cullis | No. 256 | £70 |
| 9th | Louise Clark | No. 483 | £60 |
| 10th | Paul Gurly | No. 559 | £50 |
| 11th | Mrs M E Bignell | No. 662 | £40 |
| 12th | A J York | No. 1229 | £30 |
| 13th | Mr M J Cheney | No. 048 | £20 |
| 14th | P & B Tanton Brown | No. 1061 | £10 |

November 2024

| | | | |
|------|----------------------|----------|------|
| 1st | Michael Chalkley | No. 491 | £100 |
| 2nd | Mr S Foster | No. 201 | £90 |
| 3rd | Louise Clark | No. 483 | £80 |
| 4th | Katherine Appelt | No. 161 | £70 |
| 5th | Robert Cheesman | No. 848 | £60 |
| 6th | Adrian Freeman | No. 913 | £50 |
| 7th | Pat Greenwood | No. 1162 | £40 |
| 8th | Trevor Meadows | No. 1107 | £30 |
| 9th | Brian & Susan Hopper | No. 1056 | £20 |
| 10th | Christine Sibley | No. 769 | £10 |

October 2024

| | | | |
|------|-----------------|----------|------|
| 1st | Janet Anstiss | No. 427 | £100 |
| 2nd | Mr Allan Tanner | No. 883 | £90 |
| 3rd | Mrs J E Sparrow | No. 616 | £80 |
| 4th | Lionel Marchant | No. 305 | £70 |
| 5th | Peter Jefferies | No. 610 | £60 |
| 6th | Charles Mavor | No. 838 | £50 |
| 7th | Mr D J Ballard | No. 1102 | £40 |
| 8th | Miss F E Morgan | No. 847 | £30 |
| 9th | Sarah Gooch | No. 072 | £20 |
| 10th | Lionel Marchant | No. 1043 | £10 |

December 2024

| | | | |
|------|-----------------------|----------|------|
| 1st | Paul Gurly | No. 677 | £250 |
| 2nd | Mrs Erica Martin | No. 1073 | £200 |
| 3rd | Dick Dickson | No. 101 | £175 |
| 4th | J Collett | No. 797 | £150 |
| 5th | Mr Christopher Farrar | No. 1390 | £125 |
| 6th | Jeremy Kennett | No. 1262 | £100 |
| 7th | Roger Diamond | No. 082 | £90 |
| 8th | Bernard Dobson | No. 819 | £80 |
| 9th | P A Hobbs | No. 039 | £70 |
| 10th | Dave Slack | No. 272 | £60 |
| 11th | F T Kent | No. 801 | £50 |
| 12th | Miss P Stevens | No. 127 | £40 |
| 13th | Mrs J Blee | No. 968 | £30 |
| 14th | Mr Ian Cheswright | No. 428 | £20 |
| 15th | Susan Brackly | No. 758 | £10 |

To join the 300 Club or for more information contact Chris Garman and Colin Avey at kesr.300club@yahoo.com
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The Wantage Tramway **The Story of a Bucolic Road Side** **Steam Tramway**

Richard Marks

256 pages, hardback, 246×172 mm.

100 b/w illustrations. Published by Pen & Sword Transport, George House, Beevor Street, Barnsley S71 1HN, 2024.

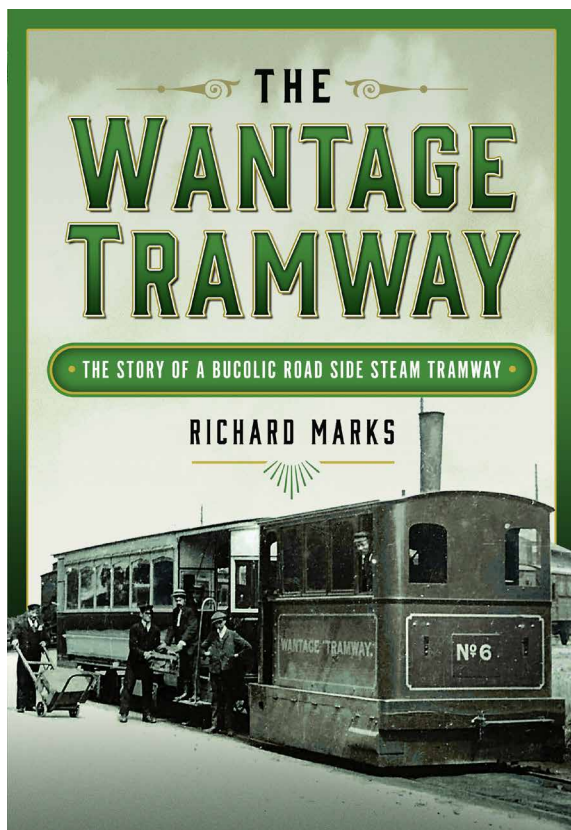
ISBN 978 1 39904 834 7. £29.99.

Isambard Kingdom Brunel, in his desire for a straight and speedy line from London to Bristol (more accurately Bristol to London), just missed the ancient and important market town of Wantage. Much like Tenterden the town wished to have a direct railway connection, and eventually took the opportunity presented by the Tramways Act of 1870 and the fading of the broad gauge dream to connect to the network by a 2½ mile long standard-gauge roadside tramway.

The line was opened in October 1875, at first horse drawn but rapidly becoming a steam tramway. Largely profitable, its eclectic collection of rolling stock became an attraction beyond what its modest length might otherwise command.

Profitable through much of its life, difficulties came in 1919 when its hitherto dynamic manager William Noble absconded with a large amount of company funds. At this point no less than Colonel Holman Stephens took a look, with a view to buying the line. His inspector (presumably William Austen) reported on the line, though his report has not survived. Stephens was due to meet the directors in August 1920 but did not proceed.

The company pulled through and, although the passenger service succumbed to bus competition in 1925, relatively profitable goods continued. However wartime damage by heavy US lorry traffic to the truly roadside track and the cost of reinstatement closed the line in late 1945. The tramway caught the attention of the GWR, and although not interested in the line itself, under local pressure it bought the 1865 locomotive *Jane* (earlier named *Shannon*) for display at Wantage Road station. It ultimately survived as a charming representative of a truly local line.



Richard Marks has written the first full story of this little line since the hitherto standard history was written by Selwyn Pearce Higgins in 1958, followed by Nicolas de Courtais' excellently illustrated softback in 2017. This densely written work has, given the advantages of modern diligent research, filled out the story of the personalities involved and funding, and its relationship with the GWR. One can only admire the dynamic of Wantage civil society in building and supporting such a line and making it a financial success whilst contributing much to the lexicon of picturesque light railways.

Although the publisher did not provide reviewers with the finished printed article, only a digital copy, this appears to be a work that, if the printer's normal standard is kept, should find a place on the shelves of those of us with a particular interest in rural byways.

BMJ

Letters to the Editor

Doodle Train

Sir – On page 26 of *Tenterden Terrier* No.155 you have a caption which reads ‘Hastings with the Doodle train on 29th September’. This date can not be correct, as I shunted the Doodle coach BSO 73 into the carriage shed on Monday 9th September to have the vinyl wraps removed.

*Graham Williams
by e-mail*

Our thanks to Graham for pointing this out. The correct date is 28th July 2024. We surmise that 29th September was the date we were working on that page! –Ed.

No Place for Misogyny

Sir – Thank you to the company for the recent AGM. Particular thanks must go to Simon Marsh for the years he has devoted to the railway as Chairman. It was interesting to hear the update on the Robertsbridge extension from Derrick Bilsby, and I await the progress of the extension with great anticipation.

There was, however, one fly in the ointment.

At one point in the proceedings the discussion involved one of our female members. I cannot remember the actual content of the discussion, but what I can remember was the voice of a gentleman behind me, stating in a quite derogatory manner, “That’s ‘cos she’s a woman!”

May I extend to the gentleman in question, and indeed, any other gentlemen of like mind, an invitation, that he/they might like to join me in the 21st century?

There really is no place for sentiments of this kind on the K&ESR in 2024/25. The railway comprises all of us, male and female, and together we are one unit, working for the betterment of the railway. I would even go so far as to suggest that, without the input of our ladies, paid and voluntary, the railway would be in dire straits.

*Dave Masterson
by e-mail*

All members of the Tenterden Terrier team would like to associate themselves with the sentiments expressed in the above letter. –Ed.



The ‘Doodle’ Coach, the subject of ‘Graham Williams’ letter and popular novelty with the public. ‘Mr Doodle’ is an increasingly well-known local artist.

(Phil Edwards)

OBITUARY

David Manger 16th July 1938 – 16th November 2024



(via Pam Manger)

David Chambers Manger was born in Bromley, Kent, although due to the war much of his early life was spent in Heswall, near Liverpool, and Postbridge, Devon. After VE Day David's father, who had been called up in 1942, remained in Germany with the aid mission and the family moved back to Kent. They lived in Chelsfield and David attended Winchester House Junior School, travelling there by train every day. He developed a lifelong interest in railways, as well as in sport which included cricket, running, high jump and, later, tennis. He also enjoyed cycling. His later education was at Sevenoaks School.

When his father returned to Britain he joined a local band of bell ringers, and at the age of 14 David joined him. This indefatigable young man then developed a keen interest in ornithology (he preferred to be known as a 'birder' rather than a 'twitcher') and also enjoyed sailing holidays on the Norfolk Broads. National service as RAF ground crew preceded a career in civil aviation, a job with a travel company being followed by a position with Canadian Pacific Air Lines at their London offices. In 1966 he married his first wife Jenny and they moved to Knoxbridge, near Staplehurst in Kent.

In 1967 David moved to South African Airways in Oxford Circus. He worked for SAA for the rest of his working life, becoming Customer Service Manager. He enjoyed travelling to South Africa on business, and he also belonged to an inter-airline group which took him around the world. His interest in aviation took a decidedly 'hands-on' aspect when he attained his private pilot licence at Headcorn Flying Club. Sadly his first marriage was not to last, but he met Pam and they married in 1980. Pam and David became keen walkers, a further interest which

combined nicely with ornithology. This led to holidays all over the British Isles and as far afield as the Caribbean, Florida and Texas.

Like so many of us, David's childhood interest in trains did not wane in later life, and holidays usually involved a visit to a heritage railway. He was a member of the Kent & East Sussex Railway although unable to volunteer at first. In 1985 David and Pam moved to a cottage between Headcorn, Smarden and Egerton. It had a large attic suitable for a 4mm scale model railway, which gave them much pleasure during the winter months. Latterly the summer months were for running their 5" gauge Thompson B1 *Springbok*. This model was started by Pam's father and completed by a bell ringing friend, Richard Down, in 2010. They ran it on the Romney Marsh Model Engineering Club track in New Romney on fine summer afternoons, and found a whole new group of friends at a time when they couldn't manage other hobbies.

Membership of the K&ESR developed when the late Chris Lowry suggested that David volunteer as a signalman after he retired. The training took 12 months and he was eventually passed out for Tenterden, Rolvenden and Northiam boxes, duties he continued with for 20 years. He particularly enjoyed Thomas weekends, galas and Santa Specials. Eventually the box steps became an issue, but after he gave up signalling he volunteered in the museum for a while.

Within bell ringing he held senior positions both locally and nationally. He was twice chairman of the Ashford District and twice Chairman of the County Committee, as well as a representative for Kent on the Central Council of Church Bell Ringers for 24 years. He was elected a Vice President of the County Association in 2010.

David was diagnosed with Parkinson's in 2022. The end, although expected, came quickly and he had to go to the William Harvey Hospital for the last 24 hours of his life. He was a larger-than-life character who was honoured with a Service of Thanksgiving and Celebration on Friday 6th December at St Mary's Church, Frittenden which was attended by his many friends from both the bell ringing fraternity and the K&ESR.

NP, with thanks to Pam Manger

THE NEXT GENERATION: Bradley Mercer



(Tony Ramsey)

One of the many strengths of the K&ESR, surely, is the reciprocal arrangement whereby some of our volunteers occasionally work on other heritage railways, while volunteers on other railways can similarly work with us. As far as we are concerned the biggest northward flow seems to be to the North Yorkshire Moors, while the biggest flow southward appears to be from the North Norfolk. One volunteer who regularly makes the journey south is Bradley Mercer.

Ever since childhood it had been Brad's dream to volunteer in a Footplate Department. The North Norfolk Railway was the obvious choice, but he faced a practical obstacle because he lived in Great Yarmouth, 40 miles away. Eventually, however, he was in a position to make the journey, and he signed up. "I love it," he confirms. "I am a Cleaner/Steam Raiser and Trainee Fireman. No two days are the same, and I love watching how the railway develops by adapting to changes."



(Tony Ramsey)

He admits, however, that at first he struggled to grasp the technique of firing. “Some of my colleagues suggested I would benefit from firing smaller engines, and Ben Boggis, Josh Courtney, Phil Graveling and Ollie Oakman (all existing K&ESR volunteers) encouraged me to consider joining them. So I signed up, started in spring 2023, and passed out as a Steam Raiser at the end of that year. I hope to qualify as a Fireman in due course. I have also given Liam some help in the shed.”

I ask him how he feels about us. “I really enjoy it here,” he enthuses, “although I find it hard to articulate the reasons. I love the place; I love learning about its history, which explains today’s railway; but most of all I love the people. There is such a great sense of community, and everyone is keen to socialise after work.” He denies there is anything here that he dislikes, although I sense the three-and-a-half hour journey to get here is not exactly a pleasure. I also ask him how we compare with the NNR. “The two are completely different,” he answers tactfully, “e.g. the length of the line, the size of the engines and the quality

of the water.” And when I ask him if he can recall any embarrassing moments (at either railway), he answers enigmatically “I’m not easily embarrassed!”

Away from the railway, Brad still lives in Great Yarmouth with his parents and younger brother. While studying English, History, Media and Psychology at Sixth Form College, he had a dream of becoming a motoring journalist; but he found that door closed, so he did a BTEC in Acting (another early interest). “I then applied to get into Drama School, but it’s notoriously difficult to get accepted, so I took a succession of boring jobs to fund myself as an amateur actor. Then one day I randomly took my CV in to a local Ford dealer. I was hoping to get a job in sales, as I’m good at prattle, but unfortunately there were no vacancies, so they gave me a job in customer services. It was hell on earth!”

Once he started volunteering at the NNR, however, he realised he could probably make a career on the Big Railway and now works for Network

Rail in S&T, based at Norwich. “I cover everywhere between Sheringham and Saxmundham and I love the variety involved, although sadly lots of my colleagues are not really interested in trains.” Despite his various interests (in addition to acting he mentions skiing and travel), he finds he doesn’t currently have enough time to pursue any non-railway hobbies.

Finally, I ask Brad to sum up his experience of volunteering at the K&ESR. “I always have a good time when I come here. There is always something to do, so you can always be helpful. Therefore I would tell anyone never to be afraid to try volunteering – just take the initiative.” When I also ask him to sum himself up, he says simply “I am a fruit and nut case.” I’m not sure whether this is meant to be serious but, if it is, I must disagree with him. I came away from this interview feeling thrilled that the K&ESR benefits from volunteers of the calibre of Brad and his NNR colleagues. Hopefully, other heritage railways can say the same about our volunteers who assist them.

Tony Ramsey

On Complaints, Freedom Tickets and a Flagship Event... *by Sequitur*

In the not-too-distant past it was said that the British were too polite to complain. Or, if they did, it was generally in a quiet and diplomatic kind of way. Now, though, complaining seems to be turning into some kind of sport. Perhaps it's something else for which we can thank social media. Or maybe Britons are merely heeding Napoleon who argued that "When people cease to complain they cease to think." Though things didn't exactly work out well for him. With the foregoing in mind we had a trawl online to see the sort of things on our railway that were attracting negative comments – partly through curiosity, but also with a strong belief that we can learn, and improve, from our mistakes.

In undertaking our research, we soon began to wonder if this was such a good idea. The overwhelming majority of reviews are positive. Is good old British reserve still alive and well in Kent and East Sussex? In fact, while we anticipated having to look back a few months, we really didn't expect to have to go back a year or more. So, here's the good news. In considering which parts of our railway are attracting negative comments, the answer is "Very few". And if you make allowance for alleged 'professional complainers', the answer is even less. (At this stage it is worth mentioning that, about ten years ago, some thought that the railway was being thus targeted, especially at Christmas.)

So, what sort of thing is causing people to vent their spleen online? We hesitate to use the phrase 'common complaint' because such things seem to be pretty much non-existent (that's how good things are!) In fact, 'complaint' might more accurately be replaced by 'observation'.

There have been a couple of observations implying that the train fare is expensive. In our experience it has also been an observation made away from the more formal environment of review websites. So let's take a look at ourselves. Is it expensive? It's a lot of money, that's for sure. But there's a difference between a lot of money and expensive. And when the observation is couched in terms that four pensioners paid a total of £106 for their train tickets, it's hard to disagree that it is a great deal of money. So let's

be open about it. Where visitors have cause to complain/observe about cost, let's acknowledge that it is a lot of money. The same can be said of most visitor attractions, and probably for similar reasons to our own. There's no shame in being honest about it.

But please, might it be time now to cease using the well-worn argument that the train fare is excellent value for money because you can ride up and down the line all day? Who, in reality, does that? (In the interest of fairness, we did find one instance where the reviewer made the journey twice.) You can have too much of a good thing: in the cold light of day, who wants to sit on a train for four hours (six hours, even!) on a hot summer's day? Or a wet summer's day, for that matter? And yes, you can alight at all the stations. But why would you, unless you are a dyed-in-the-wool walker. It's almost become a go-to excuse, no matter what your complaint might be: what great value our 'freedom' tickets are. It was even proffered to a reviewer who observed that the journey seemed to take forever. Or, if you prefer, make the journey twice, and then see how long it takes! It's on the website, it's been in leaflets. And in our opinion, it's a pretty poor response to observations that the fare is expensive. Yes, mention it by all means, but let's not overdo it. It's a bit like saying that the peak fare to London is expensive, but it's great value, because you can travel up at 5am and don't need to return until just before midnight.

The 'nothing to do' or even 'boring' observations occasionally rear their head. As we have remarked in previous columns, surely riding through beautiful countryside behind a historic locomotive is sufficient. And, interestingly, nobody has suggested quite what it is they expect to be 'doing'. Or quite what should happen to make it *less* 'boring'.

Let's not forget that one person's pain is another's pleasure. Thus the visitor who found the diesel train "very boring" and "nothing special" was countered by another who found the diesel "more interesting and nostalgic". (As well as being confounded as to how anybody could award the railway just one star.)



The focus is now more on the era during '40s Weekend'.

(John Wickham)

Even so we can't help but sympathise with the Pullman customer who watched some of their fellow passengers get drenched while boarding – or attempting to – during a cloudburst. There was an explanation as to why it happened, but that isn't the point. Might it have been better to seize the opportunity to admit it's an area of concern that merits attention? As the observation was made at the end of 2023, perhaps measures have already been put in place. Either way, it can't be too difficult to resolve.

In conclusion we doubt there is an organisation in the country that can claim perfection. Would it be unrealistic to suggest our railway comes as close as any? But let's not rest on our laurels. Let's build on them. And perhaps wryly recall the writing of James Hilton in *Good-bye, Mr Chips*: "Anno domini – that's the most fatal complaint of all in the end."

Steaming home

Trawling through our collection of K&ESR literature, we came across the programme for this summer 1986 event. It (and the previous year's 'Steam to Victory') was to be the precursor to the highly successful '40s Weekend' which has become one of our railway's principal annual events. Interestingly, neither it nor any of that year's special events featured in the timetable leaflet. Are we correct in thinking there was a separate leaflet for these? Regardless, we ponder on how the ethos of this particular event has changed with the progression of time.

In both the 1985 and 1986 events we recall war being more of a focus, while the *era* rather than

war has more become the focal point these days. In fact, we have recollections of Nazi troopers and SS staff featuring among the re-enactors in the 1985 event – neither of which would be acceptable today. On a more comedic note, actor Clive Dunn appeared at both as his *alter ego* Corporal Jones.

No less than 27 advertisers played a significant role in funding production of the programme – which ran to thirty-two pages – and visitors were asked to acknowledge this by affording them their support. The event was a joint effort, too – a collaboration between the K&ESR, the Invicta Military Vehicle Preservation Society and the Fort Newhaven Military Display Team.

It also showed that then, as now, we can pull out all the stops at our events: there were just shy of 100 vehicles in attendance. And that's excluding the cycles and motorcycles! The train service (yes, there were trains as well!) ran to Wittersham Road and was provided by four locomotives running an intensive seven-train timetable.

Being rostered for duty at both the 1985 and 1986 events, we recall the electric atmosphere at the time. It's hard to imagine that any reviewer then could have complained of there being nothing to do. In writing this piece, we occasionally found ourselves wondering how ever we did it. Then we took one final look at the programme to find a whole-page advert for the 'September Steam-Up'. "Seven or more engines in steam", the announcement trumpeted. (All our own, too, we think.) How ever did we manage *that*? 🚂

Headcorn Junction – Our Lost Main Line Connection

Having looked at the evolution of Robertsbridge Junction (Tenterden Terrier No.154, Summer 2024) Brian Janes turns his attention to the other end of the old line.

As the Rother Valley Railway sought to expand, the South Eastern Railway (SER) persuaded the local company, with a substantial guaranteed income bribe, to transfer its obligations under the unused Tenterden Railway Act to build a line to a junction at their quiet intermediate station of Headcorn. Although this meant abandoning its Ashford ambitions, the apparent prospect of extension to Maidstone, via powers finally granted in 1906, must have been crucial. As it happened, the new line was to remain at Headcorn and be quite uneconomic; but the opening of a new K&ESR Headcorn Junction station in 1905 led to interesting developments over the years.

The original layout was a straightforward Stephens' effort with a short straight platform on which sat the transferred temporary station building from the first Tenterden Town. This building was to prove surprisingly durable, surviving two movements, as did the only other

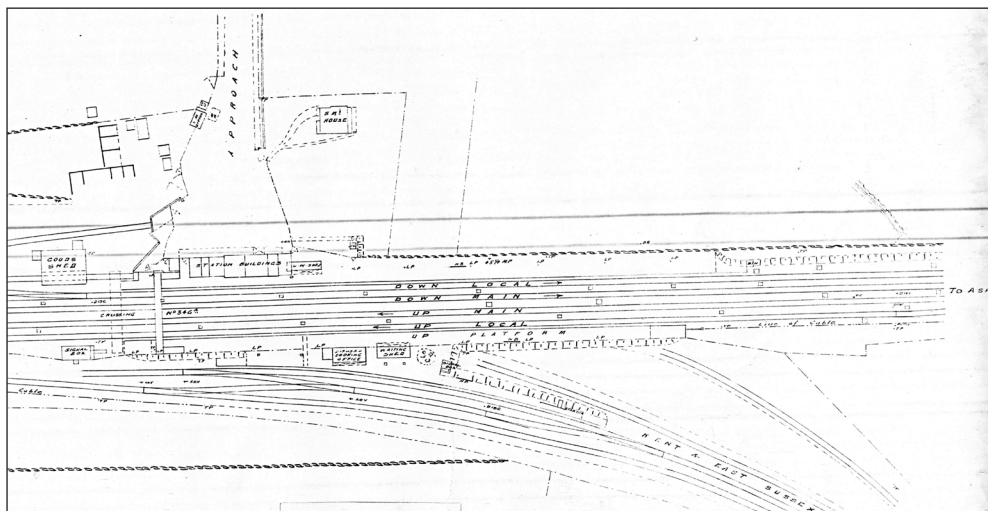
substantial structure, a small corrugated iron ground frame building like that which graced Tenterden until the preservation era. This latter controlled a simple passenger run-round loop in the platform, and a further longer goods loop towards Tenterden. Interchange with the main line was effected by a line diverging from the curve into the station from the Tenterden direction, with a head shunt accommodating a weighbridge, allied with a long single siding without road access. Entry to the main line by the sharply curved connection was under the direct gaze of the adjacent SE&CR signal box, which was just as well as there were no holding lines at that side of the old station.

Locomotive watering was provided at the Tenterden end of the station at the extreme station track limits. It consisted of two rectangular tanks on wooden trestles, filled by a wind pump taking water from the small River Sherwell below.



The first Headcorn Junction station in the 1920s.

(Photographer not known/CSRM)



The 1932 station plan.

(CSRM)

The Maidstone line as authorised (see *Tenterden Terrier* No.13, Summer 1977, available on the website) would have been a straight extension beyond the station headshunt rising to cross the main line on a substantial overbridge and crossing the River Beult, before winding its way up and over the ridge near Sutton Valance.

Expanding traffic on the main line and the need for a further set of loops for expresses to pass local trains between Paddock Wood and Ashford led to wholesale change. The entire station was remodelled by 1930 by the Southern Railway (SR), with the addition of two new fast lines through the station. This involved the demolition of the main line Up platform, its reconstruction

to the east opposite the Down platform, together with a new concrete K&ESR platform facing onto the curved alignment of the K&ESR. This change destroyed the platform and alignment of the original line and must have required some intricate line slewing to maintain services – unfortunately no record of these measures or their timing survives. The K&ESR's previous main line connection was severed and a new connection to the west end of the station joined, through a gate, a long 1,100ft SR headshunt which was an extension of its new up loop.

The remodelling included re-aligning and extending the footbridge across the SR station (probably first provided when the K&ESR



Headcorn Junction: The 1932 station in BR days.

(JJ Smith/Bluebell Collection)



Station limits watering and weighbridge hut beyond on old connection headshunt.

(Photographer not known/CSRM)

arrived in 1905) and a new signal box for the main line at the London end of the platform. The K&ESR's facilities now consisted of two interconnected loops, a short one for the passenger platform and one 650ft long for goods, apparently giving three lines through the station although the centre line, being common to both, could only effectively be used for run-round purposes. The old, severed, connecting line and its siding remained but seems to have been largely unused until, notoriously, utilised for scrapping surplus K&ESR stock in 1948.

The points and signals on the K&ESR were largely centred in a covered ground frame situated behind the platform (certainly moved from its old position opposite) though there were, additionally, hand-operated points for the London

end of the loops. The seemingly indestructible station building was moved and had a lean-to addition in the 1930s, possibly for an acetylene gas plant, and was to remain in service even after booking facilities were moved to the ancient 1842 SER building at nationalisation.

Although the K&ESR buildings were cleared after final closure in 1954/55 the centre single line of the loops lingered on into the 1960s to find use for the accommodation of condemned wagon stock. Also the 'new' concrete platform partly survived demolition when the (very little used) Channel Tunnel freight loop swept through the site in the early 1990s. The discerning can however still see the outlines of the site and remaining 1932 platform at the Tenterden end. 🚂

Notes for contributors

Our printers are set up to receive largely digital text, and this is an advantage to us as it keeps the cost down. This is increasingly important, so please try to follow the guidelines set out below.

Content

The *Tenterden Terrier* majors on K&ESR news, features on the railway past and present, and historical articles on other railways, particularly in the South East.

There is only one criterion here: any written or photographic contribution must be interesting to the reader, not just to the writer. It should only exceed 2,500 words if you trust the Editor to do his worst to shorten it – or put in a special plea for a two-parter.

Text

Copy should be sent in electronic form in word-processor format (Word is best). No need to worry about the typeface or size, but please keep it simple and do not include page numbers. Sending by e-mail attachment is the simplest method, but you can send by CD, if carefully packed.

Typewritten copy can be scanned to extract the words for printing, so can be accepted; but the Editor's task will be easier if you ask a friend to turn it into digital form. Please do not embed photos within text – submit photos separately.

Photos

Prints, negatives and transparencies can always be accepted, but generally speaking negatives and transparencies need to be of particular interest or quality to justify the necessary work.

For news and current events digital is preferred, especially if the picture is as least as good as more traditional formats. Unless used to accompany an article, a low-resolution jpeg copy of the original is initially requested. Typically the longest dimension should be no greater than 900 pixels, or resized as a copy for the web. We will request a full-size image if for possible future use, but please bear in mind that the image/file needs to be typically suitable for cropping to a minimum of 1,800 pixels (longest dimension) for A6/half a page or 2,700 pixels for A5/full page.

We can also accept pictures saved to DVD, CD or USB memory stick.

Our request for a full-sized image does not guarantee inclusion in the next or any future edition of the *Tenterden Terrier*.

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