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Steam in Trust Newsletter No. 36 – Winter 2025/2026



On Saturday 1 November 2025 Clun Castle re-enacted the BR (WR) Farewell to Steam special from London Paddington to Bristol and Cheltenham - the same engine and the same route recreating history and demonstrating what was thought impossible in 1965. Here we see 7029 awaiting departure from Paddington.

Photo: Denis Chick

MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

Welcome to Steam in Trust Newsletter No. 36, the bi-annual newsletter for Members of the Friends of Vintage Trains. The Committee would like to wish all Members and their families a very happy 2026 and thank you for your continued support throughout 2025. We also acknowledge those members of our railway family who are sadly no longer with us.

This printed newsletter is sent to all our members, including those who have opted to receive it by email, since we are including the notice of our AGM - our constitution requires that all members receive a printed copy of the AGM notice. The audited accounts will be presented at the AGM.

This year's AGM on Sunday 22 March will be followed by a complimentary buffet and talk by Anthony Coulls reflecting on the Rail200 celebrations. Anthony is the Senior Curator of Rail Transport and Technology at the National Railway Museum, the author of several books on railway and industrial history, and is active in the steam heritage movement, so do come along to the AGM and share your thoughts following another year of the Friends and stay for this social.

Full details of the AGM, including the location and schedule, are in the enclosed announcement. We have been assured several times by Vintage Trains that the unfortunate clash of dates in 2025 with the Vintage Trains Community Benefit Society AGMs will not happen again.

Mentioning Rail200, we congratulate Vintage Trains on being selected as the main line operator for the replica Locomotion and her train for the September celebrations for the bicentenary of the Stockton and Darlington Railway.

We work closely with other local groups, especially with the Friends of the Shakespeare Line, a volunteer-led community partnership who invest their time and energies to enhance the twenty-two local stations between Birmingham and Stratford upon Avon. We are delighted that their work was recently acknowledged in an Early Day Motion in the House of Commons tabled on 14 October 2025 by Manuela Perteghella, Liberal Democrat MP for Stratford-on-Avon which read:

That this House commends the outstanding work of the Friends of the Shakespeare Line in promoting the railway route between Birmingham and Stratford-upon-Avon; recognises the organisation's achievements in improving station environments through volunteer effort, community engagement and partnership working with rail operators and local authorities; applauds its success in fostering pride and stewardship among local residents and passengers; notes the positive impact of its initiatives on tourism, sustainable travel and the preservation of the region's cultural heritage; and congratulates all members and volunteers of the Friends of the Shakespeare Line for their dedication and continuing contribution to improving the passenger experience and strengthening community ties along this historic railway line.

It is always nice when volunteers' efforts are appreciated in such a public way. Well done the Tyseley Station, and Shakespeare Line, volunteers.

Like many voluntary organisations, we are a small group of dedicated volunteers mainly working from home and on specific projects such as the Tyseley Station team. We are in urgent need of more active members to keep the Friends running and developing, both for help on specific projects, again taking the Tyseley Station team as an example, and to help with the running of the group, especially on our small Committee. No in-depth knowledge of the railways is required, just an interest in the aims of the Friends and some spare time to join our small but active band of volunteers. To find out more, contact our Secretary Mary McCullough at secretary@friendsofvt.org.uk or leave her a message on 07827 899341 where she will get back to you.

We have been considering the future finances of the Friends. The Friends' income is generated mainly from member's annual subscriptions but is boosted by the running of social events, raffles and the sale of railway memorabilia and books. We enclose a note on our fundraising and ask you to consider how you might be able to contribute towards the long-term future of the Friends.

Finally, I finish on a rather sad note. Bob Timmins, the well-known sign writer who was involved in the lining and lettering of every major renovation involving Vintage Trains over the last 30 yrs, has passed away. We will have a reflection on his contribution to Vintage Trains from Bob Meanley in the next issue of Steam in Trust.

Paul Hatton, Chair

Celebrations in 2026

There are a few railway-related celebrations coming up in 2026:

- The 200th anniversary of the Stratford and Moreton Tramway. We will have an article on the history of the tramway in the next issue of Steam in Trust.
- Sir William Arthur Stanier, the renowned British railway engineer who served as the Chief Mechanical Engineer (CME) of the London, Midland and Scottish Railway (LMS) from 1932 to 1944, was born on 27 May 1876 in Swindon.
- The Settle-Carlisle line opened to passenger services in May 1876.
- GWR Castle Class 4-6-0 number 5043 was built and entered service in 1936. It was named *Earl of Mount Edgcumbe* in 1937 (so we can celebrate again next year).
- The Talylyn Railway in Wales is celebrating its 75th year as the world's first preserved railway, an event that marked the beginning of the global volunteer-run railway preservation movement. Volunteer operations began on May 14, 1951, after the railway was donated to The Talylyn Railway Preservation Society which was formed in Birmingham in May 1951 with Pat Whitehouse, later founding the Vintage Trains Charitable Trust, as the Secretary. Vintage Trains are running a celebration express train to the Talylyn Railway on Friday 17 April.

Date for the Diary

On Wednesday 25 March we will be holding the first of what we hope will be a regular film afternoon at the restored Henley Station, which we have been following in recent issues of Steam in Trust. The feature film will be the 1955 Ealing Studios *The Ladykillers*. The bar will be open and hot drinks will be available.

Henley Station is well worth a visit and is served by regular trains from Birmingham heading towards Stratford-upon-Avon. The showing will start at 1.30 pm to meet the train arriving at 1.15. Details are being finalised so keep an eye on our website; we will also be updating you in our monthly email updates.

If we have missed any other celebration-worthy events then let us know through the contact details at the end of this newsletter.

Our 2026 Friends' calendar

Recipients of our monthly email update will know about the Friends' A4 2026 full colour e-calendar which we created as a little Christmas 'thank you' to you, our loyal Members. For each month, the calendar reflects one of the various 2025 Vintage Trains tours; the calendar is available to download from the Friends' website. Every month we will be updating the calendar with the dates of the 2026 Vintage Trains tours as they are announced, and other events from the Friends and elsewhere. If you do not have internet access then feel free to ask a friend to download and print the calendar for you - it is freely available from our website.

New Street Station improvements



Photo: Paul Hatton

In our last Steam in Trust, we described our social at the Kidderminster Railway Museum when John Austin, Fellow of the Guild of Railway Artists, gave us a most entertaining double-act with Les Ross.

Any visitor to Birmingham City Centre cannot help but be impressed by the magnificent display of railway paintings on a permanent site just outside the main entrance to New St Station. They are all on large boards and depict many historical and modern scenes on Birmingham's rail network. The collection is all the work of John Austin and celebrates his paintings of steam trains, invariably with a distinctive combination of eye-catching light, spectacular landscapes

and often turbulent weather. The Friends of Vintage Trains are proud to be able to count John as an Honorary Member. This grayscale reproduction cannot do justice to the display, so next time you are near New Street Station do take time to admire the display - they undoubtedly enhance an area which is not known for being particularly photogenic!

Vintage Trains updates

The Vintage Trains Tour Programme is in full swing with lots of exciting journeys in the pipeline. Highlights include:

- **The Shap Mountaineer** on 28 March when 60163 *Tornado* pays a return visit to Vintage Trains, heading the train over Shap to Carlisle before returning via the stunning Settle & Carlisle line.
- **The Cathedrals Express** to Newcastle on 11 April. This train is a rare opportunity to see a Castle Class locomotive operating far from their former stomping grounds of South West England.
- **The Cambrian Coast Explorer** on 17 April for the Talylyn Railway, double-headed by Class 37 diesels.

Details of all the Vintage Trains tours can be seen in the enclosed brochure and on the Vintage Trains website at www.vintagetrains.co.uk. Feel free to telephone the Booking Office on 0121 708 4960 if you have any questions.

Congratulations to Vintage Trains on The Polar Express

To celebrate the 2026 21st Anniversary of the Polar Express film Vintage Trains again ran to the North Pole.

The Polar Express™ ran over 13 days and 52 trains which all ran to time bar one on the last day due to signalling issues affecting Chiltern trains. Performances on the train were high intensity, energetic and captivated audiences, who again seemed to really enjoy the experience.

Some minor Issues from previous years were eradicated; check-in was much smoother, the atmosphere in the Cube enchanting, and sales brisk. Managing the many pushchairs is always a challenge and a new tagging system made this much more streamlined than in the past - just one of the less obvious aspects of organising a very professional event.

Onboard it was all go, and a great team effort between stewards, performers, cleaners and train crew who came together once again to make this the major high-profile event in the Vintage Trains programme. There is also much extremely hard work behind the scenes at Tyseley for everyone involved in the final two tours of 2025 in parallel with the Polars. The logistics involved with swapping the train formations and coach layouts meant many extra days for the people



7029 Clun Castle with 'The Polar Express', waiting at Birmingham Moor Street to take excited passengers to the North Pole.

Photo: Mary McCullough

involved, the majority of whom are volunteers, including loading and unloading the various supplies between the different train, and the constant restocking of the Polars That the general public enjoyed all the experiences made all the hard work worthwhile.

And finally ...

We congratulate Robin Coombes, a former Committee member of the Friends and recently the Managing Director of the Kent and East Sussex Railway, on his election as a Fellow of the Chartered Institution of Railway Operators.

We have been seeking out interesting and relevant links that might interest our members. Some might remember the British children's television series *Railway Roundabout* produced by the BBC from 1958 to 1962. Presented by Patrick Whitehouse and John Adams there were many 15-minute episodes. A compilation of the 1958 Series 1 can be found on YouTube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VnX4YQPtVgc> and is well worth a watch.

If any of our members know of other interesting videos or web pages that would be of wider interest we would be delighted to hear from you for inclusion in a future Newsletter; please let us know through any of our contact details at the end of this Newsletter.

From the Archives



On 10 December 60163 Tornado, a 4-6-2 "Pacific" steam locomotive completed in 2008 to an original design by Arthur Peppercorn, made her debut with Vintage Trains on the Christmas White Rose to York. Here we see another LNER Peppercorn Class A1, 60156 Great Central, at Doncaster on 16 July 1961 after its last general overhaul prior to being scrapped in May 1965

Photo: Vintage Trains Archive

WELCOME TO NEW MEMBERS, AND CONTACTING THE FRIENDS

We welcome new member Peter Spence .

We always welcome contact from our members and can be reached by the **Contact Us** form on our website at www.friendsofvt.org.uk, email to enquiries@friendsofvt.org.uk, by phone to 07827 899341 or by writing to us at the address at the top of this newsletter.

MEMBERSHIP FORMS

Sharon Salter, our Membership Secretary, asks that members return the renewal reminder form with their renewal, **including if renewing by Bank Transfer to the Friends' account**. We need the completed form to be returned to enable the correct information to be added for any payment received. This especially manifests itself if a donation has been added to a renewal and paid via Bank Transfer; if the form is not returned Sharon must guess what the payment is for. She is also unaware that a payment has been made until our Treasurer sees the transfer, who is also unsure of who the transfer is from and for what reason it has been made.

Thank you.