

Wessex

By John Friedberger
JFriedberger@btinternet.com

LOCAL ACTION

■ ■ Membership survey

During the summer, branch members were asked to comment on rail issues and suggest improvements to services in Hampshire, Wiltshire, Dorset and the Isle of Wight.

■ ■ Future developments

The branch committee, at a meeting on 23 October, agreed a comprehensive list of proposals for improvements to our rail services in the short, medium and longer terms, based in part on the survey. The list will be circulated to those members who responded to the survey during November.

■ ■ Freight returns to Fratton

Good news sometimes pops up with little advance publicity. *RAIL* magazine reports that freight services will return to Fratton on 30 November – after a gap of 30 years. The first trains will run from Portsmouth to Widnes and there are exciting plans for further developments.

■ ■ CrossCountry

It is hard to see much benefit to rail passengers in southern England from the new CrossCountry rail franchise awarded to Arriva.

The truncated network which was specified by the Department for Transport to run from December 2008 is ameliorated in only very small measure by the promise that there will be just one daily (less Sundays) return service from Bournemouth to Newcastle.

All the other CrossCountry trains from the South Coast will run to Manchester. Fine city though it is, not everyone wants to go there.

It is surely illogical on the one hand to extol the advantages of rail over air or road for journeys between major centres in this country and, at the same time, axe the very system that can deliver them.

DfT statistics no doubt indicate the obvious, i.e. that the majority of cross-country passengers do not travel the whole distance, but they neglect an important minority of people for whom a longer rail journey is their only means of travelling.

There is now little prospect that the severely pruned timetable will be changed in the short term but Wessex branch will continue to press for a gradual extension of CrossCountry services in future.

■ ■ Timetable changes

Southern is recasting its coastal timetable, in part to fill the gap left by the withdrawal of SWT's service from Basingstoke to Brighton. We will monitor the effects of these and other changes with particular reference to the ease of connections along the South Coast.

■ ■ AGM 2008

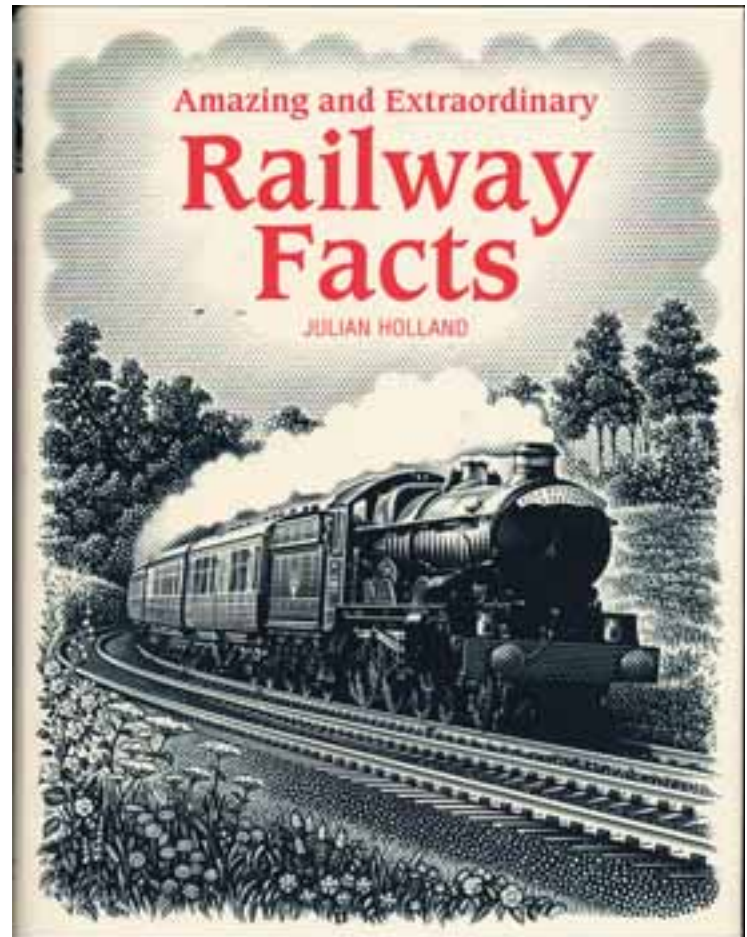
The branch AGM will be held near Bournemouth main station on Saturday 15 March. Details will be sent out in the New Year.

■ ■ Portsmouth area resignalling

After nearly a year of severe disruption to passenger services in the Portsmouth area it is to be hoped that this mismanaged scheme will finally have been completed by the time this issue of *Railwatch* goes to press.



Railwatch book offer



Railwatch readers can buy this new book at £1 less than the shop price.

Published by David & Charles *Amazing and Extraordinary Railway Facts* is by Julian Holland.

Mr Holland says the "compact and charming book" is intended to be "dipped into at random and read in any order".

He says it is ideal for train and railway enthusiasts whether they want to discover which are the longest running tunnels, widest bridges and most powerful locomotives, or ponder the rags-to-riches life of Frank Hornby.

The publisher says it is "beautifully illustrated with detailed drawings and black and white photographs."

"It is chock-full of facts and fun stories and would make an ideal gift."

Some of the questions it answers: What is the story behind the Mallard's speed record? Why did

Brunel's atmospheric South Devon Railway fail?

Who were the most famous locomotive engineers and designers?

How did the locomotive manage to reach the summit of Snowdon Mountain in the 19th Century?

The book also tells us that 40 tons of silkworm eggs were once sent by the LNWR for shipment to Japan, with special precautions to ensure they did not hatch out en route.

The 128 page book has 100 black and white illustrations.

Amazing and Extraordinary Railway Facts by Julian Holland. 978-0-7153-2582-7

Railwatch readers can order this book for £8.99 (normal price £9.99) with free post and packing (UK only). To order please call the David & Charles hotline on 0870 9908222 or email dcdirect@davidandcharles.co.uk and quote code E0018

By Trevor Garrod

trevorgarrod2000@yahoo.co.uk

The North Norfolk Railway, a corporate member of Railfuture, operates five miles of a line which for over 70 years brought thousands of visitors each summer to the resorts of Cromer and Sheringham and villages along a beautiful stretch of coast.

Its traditional role ceased in 1959 with the closure of the Midland & Great Northern Railway main line; though Cromer and

Sheringham together with West Runton have retained a rail link in the form of what is now the Bittern Line from Norwich. Now the North Norfolk Railway has a new role serving holidaymakers and day trippers following its reopening, initially to Weybourne in the 1970s and subsequently to the outskirts of Holt.

In August, the railway was bustling with visitors. A considerable number had bicycles, baby buggies or wheelchairs for which there was ample space