

Get to know your steam line

By John Ginns

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First of all, back to *Railwatch* 102 and the question: Which heritage railway invented Santa Specials?

Many thanks to Malcolm Clark, who is a member of Railfuture and the Keighley and Worth Valley Railway.

It was indeed the five-mile K&WVR in West Yorkshire, that first brought Santa to the railway back in December 1966. This was 18 months before the line properly reopened as a preserved railway for passengers in June 1968.

In December 1969 the K&WVR displayed the first Santa Special headboard, a seasonal practice now adopted by virtually all heritage railway Christmas operators.

Now I can hear many a Railwatch reader muttering: "Help! What's happening to Railwatch? Are we going backwards?"

But Malcolm also writes: "The K&WVR Preservation Society was initially founded to provide a public transport service and, whilst modern reality has inevitably pushed this objective into a secondary role, this has always been, and still is, one of the railway's objec-



KEIGHLEY: Where you can change from a Northern Trains electric service on to a steam-hauled tourist train that can take you in style to Bronte country

Picture: JOHN GINNS

tives. "K&WVR timetables are published in the local Metro booklets for the Aire Valley alongside the electric services and we give local residents half price travel with a free residents' railcard.

The station staff at Keighley look out for passengers from main line services and when necessary will hold the K&WVR departure".

Many thanks to Malcolm for this

valuable and thought-provoking contribution.

Setting out by rail from Grantham I travelled on the K&WVR this winter and can vouch that the mid-afternoon train from Keighley to Oakworth, Haworth and Oxenhope, although lightly loaded, had a balanced patronage of sightseers and local people travelling home with their shopping. And they served mince pies on the train! Save our railway? – they certainly have.

So we Railfuture members ought to be asking what it is that has made it possible for heritage railways to make such progress in the preservation of discarded locomotives and rolling stock, station buildings and abandoned railway routes, but more difficult for many of the lines to establish recognised public services – which was their original aim.

Many of the answers may be obvious enough, others more obscure, but many of the issues are at last beginning to be addressed as the new concept of the community railway is surfacing, creating a much-needed bridge between the national railway and local preserved lines.

Forty years ago the K&WVR, and others in a similar situation, could easily have called themselves community railways. I wonder why they didn't. Would it have made any difference then?

Behind the front-line political cutting edges of Railfuture, so absolutely essential for our campaigning of course, I suspect there is a heritage railways vacuum which many members see only as a steaming, antique recruiting ground for our organisation.

From where I sit in the backroom, such an attitude appears so short-sighted and one-sided.

I believe the reality of railway evolution, across its whole wide spectrum, and in the hands of human ingenuity, is much more subtle and deserves a wiser approach.

So my suggestions to every Railfuture branch are:

■ Get to know the heritage railways in your area. What makes them tick? What are their short, medium and long-term aims? How do you see their potential in the world of rail travel? How can we work with them and them with us to bring the reality of railway travel into more people's transport thinking?

■ Appoint a local heritage railways liaison member.

■ Recognise that there are two sides to every heritage railway – the railway operating people, many of whom are already members or sympathetic to Railfuture aims, and their passengers, many of whom have little or no other contact with railway travel.

■ If they don't already do it, ask your heritage railways to put *Railwatch* on sale and to display local Network Rail and rail user group travel information. In return ask for copies of their timetable leaflets etc to bring to the attention of Railfuture members. Don't be seen to be fanatical about Railfuture recruitment on the heritage railway, important though it is to us. Talk about the end products – working railways that people use. A worthwhile product properly marketed ultimately sells itself.

■ Whatever your feelings about steam locomotives, old rolling stock and so-called fun rides, remember – it's the railway itself that matters. For children in particular this may be their only experience in travelling without a windscreen in front of them and impatient drivers all around them.

■ Remember that no two heritage railways are the same. There is no simple golden rule and no single set of goal posts.

Let's work together. We have so much in common.

The Keighley & Worth Valley Railway trains run into Keighley Network Rail station from Oxenhope, Haworth, Oakworth and Ingrow. Cheap day return fares are available from Leeds. For K&WVR info: 01535-645214 or www.kwvr.co.uk

Railfuture news

■ This year RDS Group Travel is planning two visits to the Continent. The first of these is to Berne in Switzerland in May and by the time you read this should be fully booked. The second will be to Berlin from 12-18 September. It will be led by Jim Walker and organised by Trevor Garrod and Peter Cannon. It is hoped to do the journey from London to Berlin, by train, in one day, and spend six nights in the German capital. Full information should be available in late May. For details, please send SAE to Trevor Garrod, 15 Clapham Road South, Lowestoft NR32 1RQ.

In April 2000 a large party of members undertook a very interesting visit to Berlin. This year's trip will be a good opportunity to see the progress in the city's development, and development of its public transport system, five years on; and to meet local members of our two German sister organisations, Pro Bahn and Deutscher Bahnkunden Verband.

■ Railfuture stalwart Eric Layfield is recovering at home after several weeks in hospital following a stroke. But he will probably not be able to resume his full activity in Railfuture for some time. Please address any relevant material to the acting secretary of the freight committee, Gary Tinsey, 3 Hartford Close, Rayleigh, Essex SS6 9DQ. Tel: 01268. Email: gary_tinsey@hotmail.com

■ BRANCH LINE NEWS for sale. Magazine of the Branch Line Society. Complete issues (1980 - 1991) - some in binders. Offers* to John Barfield, 108, Berwick Road, London E16 3DS (Tel: 020 7474 5722) Email: Jwbarf@aol.com. Any contribution goes to Railfuture funds.

■ Railfuture lottery winners for December were: P J Lugg, Bourne End £40, Roger White, North Harrow £25; Peter Moore, Leamington £15, Brian Balmain, Rothesay £10, Alan Cooke, Hampshire £5, Bill Stoneham, Maidstone £5

■ A Railfuture team met Transport Minister Tony McNulty and three members of the Department for Transport rail team on 10 February. Mr McNulty denied any intention on the Government's part of encouraging or simplifying rail closures in the Railways Bill. We also talked about the need to protect railway land, integrated transport, bustitution and passenger representation. The Railfuture team included president Peter Lawrence, vice-president Michael Caton, chairman Mike Crowhurst, and policy secretary Norman Bradbury.