



MINUTES OF THE FRIENDS OF VINTAGE TRAINS ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
Held on 24 March 2024 at Tyseley Working Men's Club

Item No.	Subject
	The Secretary confirmed that the meeting was quorate with 33 Members in attendance.
1. CHAIRMAN'S WELCOME	The Chairman thanked everyone for attending the meeting and also the staff at the Tyseley Working Men's Club for their help and support in arranging this meeting.
2. APOLOGIES	Phil Dalton, Judith Howard, Phil Roden, Michael Whitehouse, John Arms
3. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 27 MARCH 2023	The Minutes of the previous meeting held on 27 March 2023 had been circulated with the January newsletter and were taken as read. No matters were raised and the Minutes were approved and signed by the Chairman.
4. CHAIRMAN'S REPORT (Paul Hatton)	It was noted with great sadness that Richard Moreton, a former Member and volunteer Train Steward had passed away recently. Condolences were extended to Richard's wife, Jane, and family. In the past year we welcomed Denis Chick and Fraser Pithie to the Committee. Denis has responsibility for communications at Wythall Transport Museum, and Fraser, amongst other things, is a leading member of the Shakespeare Line Rail Users Group, we valued their knowledgeable input to our deliberations. Support to Vintage Trains (VT) There are many areas where the Friends had supported VT but some examples are: • during the year the Friends adopted the Sutton Miniature Railway as its fundraising theme for the year, donating money raised from book sales, raffles etc. This generated £59. The Friends also donated towards the Sutton Belle boiler appeal, which was covered further in the Treasurer's report. • Via our website we linked volunteer applications through to the Volunteer Team at Vintage Trains. There were 25 applications throughout the year. • The Friends supported the VT 'Town Hall' and other meetings by helping with refreshment provision. • The Friends supported the VT site tours with refreshment provision. Volunteer Teams were not often appreciated but we would like to record our thanks to them, and to the Members for their continued support. During the year we had increased our social media visibility through Facebook and X (formerly Twitter), and with monthly briefing emails sent direct to Members where an address had been given. This enabled us to send out late breaking news or special offers which VT occasionally make. We encourage all members with an email address to opt in to receive these communications. Various social events had been arranged by Neil Ewart. These included: • Two film screenings at the Electric Cinema, which has now closed. • Walk up and go trip to the Great Western in Wolverhampton. It was the first one and worked well. • Social at Kidderminster Railway Museum, with a fascinating talk by Mike Corbett on the restoration of the Flying Scotsman in 2016, and followed in the afternoon by an 'in conversation' conducted by Les Ross with Ray Churchill and Ray Poole. • A diesel depot visit at the Severn Valley Railway diesel depot, organised by Al Wallace.

A further visit to the Kidderminster Railway Museum is planned in October and also a trip to Llangollen is in the pipeline. We do ask Members to confirm their attendance when events are advertised so that we can gauge whether the trip/talk should go ahead or not.

Membership had held steady throughout the year, ably managed by Membership Secretary Sharon Salter. Sharon was thanked for her unstinting work. The Committee had reviewed Membership subscription levels and had, reluctantly, recommended an increase in fees. This was discussed later in the Treasurer's report. The Friends had rejoined the Birmingham Heritage Forum (BHF) which enabled us to promote the Friends and selective parts of Vintage Trains' activities, particularly the Shakespeare Express, amongst our local peer organisations. As a consequence of rejoining the BHF, the Committee decided not to renew its membership of the Heritage Railway Association (HRA) which mainly focussed on preserved railways. We understand VT have taken up membership of the HRA and it was therefore felt not a good use of Friends' limited funds.

The Station Team, led by Neil Ewart, have done a great job throughout the year. The team included Neil, Sharon, Mary, and John Turvey. The main problem with the station had been graffiti which Neil removed as soon as he could. Anyone who is able to help, particularly if they live locally, please contact Neil to discuss, especially if they see any damage.

The Friends attended the Warley National Model Railway show in November but Warley will not be holding the event at the NEC in the future as it was too costly and onerous for their small team. It was a successful event for the Friends as we had Sutton Belle on show which garnered a lot of interest. It was also an opportunity to promote the Shakespeare Express tours.

We continued to work closely with Heron Press, our locally based design and printer agency, in the production of 'Steam in Trust'.

Sadly the Committee had taken the decision not to produce a 2025 Calendar as sales had fallen and the cost had become prohibitive. The previous ones had been very well received but following market research at Warley it highlighted that people don't buy calendars so much now so that initiative, in printed form, has been shelved.

The Chair thanked the Committee for their unstinting support during the year, also the paid staff at Vintage Trains, and the staff at Tyseley Locomotive Works for all their work, the Members of the Friends for their unwavering support, and the volunteers for their dedication.

5. TREASURER'S REPORT (Chris Schroeder)

The financial report covers the period 1 January to 31 December 2023. The accounts had been signed off by an independent auditor, giving his time free of charge.

Income had increased very slightly compared to 2022 mainly through Member's subscriptions, although there was a slight reduction in donations. The Treasurer thanked all members who had added a donation onto their subscription which was very much appreciated. There were changes between 2022 and 2023 which had affected our turnover. In 2022 the Friends ran the Buffet on the trains in terms of purchasing and selling stock and retained any profit made. This was then given in the form of donations to VT for named projects. At the end of 2022 VT resumed the running of the Buffet, volunteers still man the Buffet but VT supply all the goods and take the profit, that's why in 2023 there was zero income from the Buffet.

Expenditure for the year was £9,800 compared to £9k in 2022. The increase was mainly due to the cost of postage and printing of the calendar which unfortunately made a loss. Printing costs had gone up significantly and the Committee had taken the decision not to do a calendar for 2025. Steam in Trust costs have also gone up. In 2022 the Friends made a donation of £2k to the Pullman Fund and in 2023 we decided to fund the Sutton Miniature Railway Project and gave a donation of £1,300 for a new boiler barrel for Sutton Belle. Any income from book sales goes to the project to purchase a tender axle. The Sutton Miniature Railway project is important and encourages youngsters in engineering and driving locomotives.

Your Committee did not take any money or expenses, subscriptions go entirely towards running the Friends and provide financial support to Vintage Trains or the Sutton Miniature Railway project.

An item of expenditure the Committee felt was necessary was the purchase of a new laptop for the Membership Secretary. The Committee continue to be very conscious of the importance of holding Members' personal details safely, i.e. names, addresses, email addresses, telephone numbers, and, after consideration of the requirements of the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR), they felt the best way to do this would be to have a laptop specifically dedicated for holding Members' information only. It is a standalone laptop, password protected, and not connected to the Internet, which Sharon Salter, the Membership Secretary holds securely. Members' information cannot be accessed by anybody else so it is ring-fenced. A further item of expenditure was to pay some fees for Warley Model Railway exhibition. Sutton Belle had been transported to the NEC on a trailer which was parked all weekend and incurred parking fees. The Committee decided, rather than pass the bill onto the Sutton project, the Friends would pay the fee and regard it as a donation to the project.

Subscriptions had remained the same for five years, and unfortunately, with rising costs, the Committee felt they had to recommend an increase in subscription rates to maintain the viability of the Friends. The main benefit Members get out of their membership is a twice yearly, quality 'Steam in Trust' magazine, supplemented with additional newsletters and they are the main administrative costs and those costs have increased significantly. The Committee had tried to limit the increase in subs as much as possible and felt this should be roughly 25% across all levels of subscription, therefore it was proposed to increase subs by £5 a year, i.e. an adult subscription would change from £20 to £25. The Committee appreciated times are difficult for a lot of people but this increase was necessary to ensure the viability of the organisation. The junior rates would only increase by 12% in order to encourage young people to become members. It was hoped Members would understand the need to increase subscriptions and would approve these new figures. The Committee also felt the age limit to move to senior membership should change from 60 to 65 years of age. This would not apply to existing members but would come into force for new members. The Membership Secretary does not hold any date of birth information so it is up to Members' honesty. Currently there are 399 members (354 memberships). The rate of inflation over the last five years was roughly 25% so this recommendation was in line with inflation. The increase was approved by the meeting on a show of hands.

Chris would stand for re-election this year but will be standing down in 2025 and if anyone would like to take on the role then Chris will be happy to talk.

The report was proposed, seconded and approved on a show of hands.

6. ELECTION OF COMMITTEE

The current Committee, Denis Chick, Neil Ewart, Paul Hatton, Mary McCullough, Fraser Pithie, Sharon Salter and Chris Schroeder had confirmed they would be willing to stand for election and no new nominations were received.

The appointment of the Committee was proposed, seconded and elected on a show of hands.

7. APPOINTMENT OF COMMITTEE OFFICERS

At this point the Chair, Paul Hatton, stood down and the meeting resumed with Neil Ewart taking the lead. Neil thanked Paul for his extremely hard work over the year. Paul was willing to carry on as Chair for next year and this was proposed, seconded and approved on a show of hands. Paul resumed chairmanship of the meeting.

Chris Schroeder was proposed as Treasurer and Mary McCullough as Secretary. *These were seconded and duly elected on a show of hands.*

8. APPOINTMENT OF AUDITOR

The Committee felt that, although not a legal requirement, it was important that the accounts were audited independently in order that our members were reassured that the Friends' records are kept in good order. The Treasurer recommended that Kevin McCullough ACMA be proposed to carry out the 2024 audit. Mr McCullough is not a member and therefore will act in an independent capacity. *Proposed, seconded and approved on a show of hands.*

9. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

1. **Logo** – Denis Chick introduced a new design for the Friends logo. He reflected that the organisation had matured over the years and offered more value, such as the social events and an improved magazine. Relationships had been developed with the Shakespeare Line Rail Users Group and Wythall Transport Museum and the Friends now looked more broadly at Midlands transport. During the year members of the Committee had talked to a designer to create a new logo that gave the Friends a stronger identity as an independent organisation. The new design shows a Castle class locomotive with hands surrounding to show we are looking after vintage trains, with a railway lozenge at the bottom. This new logo will be used in all Friends communications. The magazine has also been re-designed to give a more modern look, incorporating the colours of the logo. This would be launched later in the year. Copies of the newly designed magazine will be sent to all the heritage transport magazines and tell them what we are doing and used as a membership drive. The magazine will incorporate Vintage Trains' activities but will talk about the wider picture.
2. **Volunteering** – Mike Corbett addressed the meeting to raise awareness of the need for more volunteers. He noted that the Vintage Trains website now has a link for volunteer information on the Friends website which was a step forward. The current volunteering leaflet was produced six years ago and needs urgent revision. If anyone has any ideas of how to encourage new volunteers please contact Mike or Tony Watson, the Vintage Trains' Volunteer Coordinator.

Meeting ended at 12.30pm.

Signed: **Dated:**