



Minutes of the Meeting of Society and Branch Officers

Held on 26th October 2014 at The Queens Hotel, Llandudno

In attendance:-

Representing the Management Committee and Officers:-

Gordon Davies – Society Chairman
Bob Green – Society Secretary
Reg Wood – Society Treasurer
Mike Robinson – Managing Editor, Railway Observer
Eric Palmer – Chairman, Development Sub-Committee
Alan Cooke – Branch Liaison Officer
David Pick – Chairman, Library Sub Committee
David Kelso – Publicity Officer
David Goddard – Membership Secretary
John Day – Members Weekend Co-ordinator
Steve Ollive – Assistant Treasurer, Renewals
Bob Ellison – Assistant Treasurer, Branch Finances
Les Nixon – Photographic Portfolio Secretary
Ronnie McAdam -- Publicity Communications

Representing the Branches:-

Bristol – Paul Udey, Roger Newman, Callum Macleod
Cambridge – Robert Bartlett
Cheltenham – no representation.
Chichester – no representation.
Croydon and South London – Jeremy Harrison
East Midlands – Rodney Allen, John Hitchens
Furness, Lakes and Lune – Alan Sattenstall, John Broughton
Hitchin – David Elsdon
Humberside – No representation.
Ipswich and District – Eric Palmer, John Day
Lancashire and North West – Ian Derrick, Noel Machell, Roger Sutcliffe
Merseyside, Chester and North Wales – No representation.
Milton Keynes – Bob Ballard, Mark Richards.
North East – Margaret Fraser, Malcolm Hammond, Jim Sedgwick, Tony Skinner
Northampton – David Pick
Peterborough – Robert Warburton
Scotland – Richard Thorburn, Ronnie McAdam
Sheffield – Alan Lovecy, Jim Bryant, David Munday
South East – Mike Woodward, David Kelso, John Holloway, David Blackman
South Essex – Steve Hewitt
South Wales / De Cymru – Andrew Hemmings, Paul Hooker
Solent – Mike Green
Surrey – Andy Davies, Irene Rabbits. Peter Bosomworth
Sussex – no representation.

Thames Valley – Nigel Farebrother, Denis Horsman, David Evans-Roberts
Watford – no representation,
West Midlands – Derek Morris, Bob Barby, David Walker
West of England – no representation.
West Riding – Bob Green, Steve Batty, Bill Jagger
Windsor and Maidenhead – David Goddard, Sally Goddard, Steve Ollive, Alan Cooke

1. Opening of Conference Address – Gordon Davies (Society Chairman)

Before I start the official business you will have read in the RO of the sudden death on the 6th of August of Peter Robinson, the chairman of the FL&L branch. Peter had booked to attend this weekend activities however his wife Margaret did attend and was at the dinner last night. The death of Peter is a very sad loss for his family and for the society. Could we all please stand for a minute as a mark of respect to Peter Thank you.

In opening this conference I would like to welcome you all to Llandudno or as we say in this part of the world 'Croeso i Landudno' and thank you for attending today, A very warm welcome is extended to those of you who are attending their first conference and hope that you will find this experience worthwhile and that you will be back next year.

A special welcome to those of you attending for the first time are:- John Broughton, Roger Sutcliffe, Steve Hewitt, Jim Bryant, Lawrie Bowles, Denis Horsman and David Evans- Roberts.

I hope that you will find conference of benefit but more importantly return next year.

We have had a superb weekend here in Llandudno and I would like to extend my personal thanks to John Day, Irene Rabbitts and Andy Davies once again in putting all this lot together and as usual it has worked like clockwork.

First of all I would like to apologise for the late arrival of last year's conference minutes. this was due to a combination of issues and out of Alan's hands. Alan who is taking the minutes will endeavour the minutes for today's conference will be ready by the end of the year but no later than the New Year.

We made it, I refer of course to the naming of 43014 as The Railway Observer at Derby on the 17th of June. I did have my doubts that it would ever happen however it did and my thanks to all involved. Eric Palmer will cover that a little more in his report. Whilst at the naming ceremony I was informed that the whole train is to be repainted towards the end of this year or the beginning of next year so we may see it out of action for a while but when it does reappear it should shine in its new coat of paint. Can I please ask how many of you have seen 43014 with the RO nameplates?

Did you take any pictures because our image editor David Kelso has received only one photo since the naming in June. He is desperate for some good quality shots so when you get home please send him some and with a bit of luck they may appear in the RO.

The other day I went into my local W H Smith in Broughton where I live to buy a role of Sellotape and as usual I got pestered as I do whenever I go into W H Smith no matter which part of the country to buy one of these. (BAR OF CHOCOLATE) Relentless it is, Crewe station, Peterborough, Inverness, Glasgow Queen Street just to name a few. At one location I walked in and stated 'Good morning and I do not want any chocolate thank you' The very nice lady behind the counter informed me that it was company policy to invite all customers to buy a bar of chocolate as discount prices. I wonder how many extra boxes of chocolates they sell every month.

Now do you think we could apply 'The W. H. Smith' kind of policy to RCTS branches when it come to recruitment at branch meetings and exhibition stands. I know for certain that despite Alan Cooke sending out all the details last year and again he has sent out information regarding the 2015 recruitment campaign some branch fail to mention this at their meetings but I am pleased to report that many other branches do mention the offer at all their meetings. We are missing an ideal opportunity to recruit and at a bargain price of £15 for the coming year it should be mandatory that all branch chairmen or whoever is the MC at indoor meetings to mention the recruitment campaign.

A person I know who I had not seen or spoken to for some time had moved house and attended his local branch. I asked if had become as a member and had the branch advertised the then rate of £16. He had heard nothing announced at the meeting however a month later he went then and had to ask one of the committee about this special offer. Once informed and given an application form he joined on the spot.

Our new publicity officer Peter Fortune from the South Wales branch has gone away to look at advertising in some of the commercial magazines however any branch chairman or any branch committee member who is the MC at meeting can I appeal to you to mention the £15 at every meeting. It may be that you look at the audience and realise that they are all members and not one visitor is present but mention it anyway and get our members to bring a friend or neighbour who may be interested in railways to the next meeting and get them to join

So if anyone asks you when you get back to your branch what was the main point discussed at conference tell them "Sellotape and Chocolate" and that we must mention the 2015 recruitment campaign at all meeting whether indoor or outdoor. In 2014 we managed at branch level to recruit 57 new members (2 down on 2013) however with a little more effort we hopefully next year announce that we have had a record recruitment at branch level in 2015

This leads me on to the results of the 2014 campaign. Once again Hitchin have beaten all branches in the fact that they have recruited 6 new members this year therefore in a two year period they have recruited 18 new members. Congratulations and I would like to call on David Elsdon our exhibition officer and Hitchin branch secretary to come forward and received this small token of the MC's appreciation for doing a grand job again this year, well done David and the team at Hitchin.

You will have by now received your very posh renewals letter. You will hopefully have noticed that the envelopes have been franked which saves Steve Ollive, David and Sally Goddard hours of work in not having to stick thousands of stamps on envelopes and in purchasing a franking machine we also save a considerable amount on postage.

Again Mr Branch Chairmen can you remind your branch members to get the renewal letter back to Steve ASAP however please encourage all to take out renewals by Direct Debit again they will save some cash as the DD offer is a £1 cheaper than ordinary membership. DD also make it easier for Steve and then we will not get the phone calls and e-mail in February saying "I've not had my February RO" all because someone forgot to renew their membership. On the introduction of DD last year 333 members took up the option (16%) Mike Robinson the RO Editor will be taking later on the new electronic RO in which you can now view on your tablets, iphones and the other marvels that you can purchase in this electronic age.

My thanks go to all my colleagues on the MC for the long hours they put in whatever they are dealing in, to all you other society officers as well as all on the various sub committees as well as all of you at branch level who do so much work to keep the society going.

To finish I do hope that all your contributions this morning are productive and that we carry on in maintaining all RCTS activities and enhance the services we give to our members and hopefully we will get many more members new members in future years thus ensuring that the RCTS is still 'Britain's Leading Railway Society'.

2. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from:- Jim Crane (Cambridge), Brian Arman (Bristol), Bruce Oliver (Chichester), Richard Neale, Alan Donaldson, Alan Turton, Geoff Morris, D, Douglas, J Penn (Merseyside, Chester & North Wales), Ted Vaughan, John Godfrey (Solent), Keith Mapley (South East), Steve Lacey, David Cole (Hitchin), Paul Baston, Paul Snelling (Sussex), David Beeken, Bill Jagger, M J Holt, J Holgate (West Riding), Gordon Earl, Ian Reid, Peter Smith (West Midlands), Jim Tucker (Windsor & Maidenhead), Carey Vessey, John Foreman (Humberside), Bev Steele, Colin Prime, Dave Beecroft (Ipswich), Peter Wilson (Croydon & South London), John Sweet, Roger Baily (Peterborough), John Redgate (MC), David Jackman (MC), David Mitchell, Charles Woodland and David Dormon (West of England), Geoff Plumb (Watford), Jim Waite, Pat Dewsnap (South Essex), John Harrison (Northampton) Hugh Gould and Terry Silcock,

The following branch did not submit an Apology for Absence

Cheltenham

3. Confirmation of the minutes of the 2013 Officers Conference

Minutes of the 2013 Officers Conference were proposed for acceptance by Mike Green (9297) and seconded by Bob Barby (5843).

4. Matters Arising not covered by the Agenda

No matters arising were raised.

5. The Railway Observer – Report by Mike Robinson

Gentlemen – It seems that holding the OC in October has a bad effect on RO delivery. Once again after 12 months in which the RO arrives on the doorstep by the start of the month, the techie gremlins again let us down with the result that this months copy did not generally arrive until the 11th. However with two different digital versions available on the website by the 1st of the month the RO was available to all those registered for digital access.

Which raises an interesting point. The 'digital RO' has been available for over 18 months during which it has been well promoted both through the RO's Noticeboard and at both AGM and Officers Conference. However - difficult as it is to believe – I had an email from a member a couple of weeks ago which congratulated the Editorial team for the improved quality of the magazine, but commented that he found the size of the print too small. Going on to say that, whilst he understood that increasing print size would impinge on the amount of material in the RO, he suggested it would be a good idea to produce an electronic version – just like his daily paper, which he already reads in electronic form! Suffice to say that when I responded saying we already had an E-RO - and telling him how to find it, – he came back almost immediately with a one word answer 'Brilliant'!

So, another satisfied customer for our digital initiative. But it does pose the question how many more members remain in ignorance of the development. Therefore I would implore you all, as Officers of the Society, to promote the both the Digital RO and Digital Membership at every opportunity but especially at Branch Meetings.

Whilst the RO has been available on PC's and Laptops for some 18 months users of Android and Apple mobiles and tablets have been excluded as these devices required a different technical solution. I am pleased to announce that this problem has now been resolved and we have this week extended our digital reach by making the digital RO also available on these devices. Just access it

via the Societies website following the links to this years Railway Observer then click on the hyperlink to Pagesuite.

The RO has enjoyed a very good year and we have had much positive feedback, both about the more professional feel of the magazine and of the many interesting features and wide range of illustrations included. Excluding the cover, a typical issue now includes around 48 pages of textual information and features and 24 pages of photographs, and as an all-volunteer operation, the RO has probably now reached its maximum practical size. With the major imaging display benefits now offered by the digital magazine, there is no longer any value in resizing the magazine to A4 format and I can confirm that the printed version will continue as an A5 booklet for the foreseeable future.

Throughout the year Amadeus have performed faultlessly in both producing the magazine in a timely fashion and responding promptly to the few development issues raised by the Editor. Indeed much of the quality improvement is due to a close unhesitating technical relationship between Amadeus and David Kelso, our image Editor, and David will agree that without Amadeus helping us understand what was technically possible, the magazine you receive be very much more average than is now the case.

Turning to the issue of content, as a member driven publication we can only publish what we receive from you, the members, and whilst we have managed to productively fill all 72 pages of every issue, when I start compiling some issues I often imagine the situation where we end up resorting to that dreadful quasi governmental habit of including pages empty except for the dread wording "This page has been left intentionally blank"! Indeed the more perceptive of you may conclude that it is these months where the Editors readily available photo archive suffers a last minute raid!

Thus the usual appeal both for high quality ex-camera images and for articles – whether photo based or purely textual – on subjects of general rail enthusiast interest. With 2,500 members, many with along standing photographic interest, there must be a wealth of unexploited photo material residing within our membership and to provide an outlet for some of this I plan to introduce a regular 'Vintage' photo feature in early 2015. This will generally consist of a double page of related images from members' own cameras, illustrating activities in a particular area or of a particular traffic type in the years before digital technology took hold – effectively the 20th century. Whilst a double page feature generally requires four images, to ensure sufficient technically acceptable images are included potential contributors should ideally submit perhaps six images which then gives us the flexibility to select those likely to provide the best image when transposed to paper. If you are able to supply high quality digital scanned images, please forward them via email to both David Kelso and myself. However if you need to send hard copy slides or prints please mail these directly only to David. Hard copy images will be scanned by David and returned before any decision is taken as to likely use.

Whilst Over the Points continues to generate member comments –both positive and negative, it is disappointing that thus far, despite my request at last years Officers Conference only four Society Officers have provided submissions. Therefore, given the additional workload OTP imposes on the editorial team, I am considering whether this item should continue, and indeed if no further contributors emerge will probably discontinue it during 2015.

Other than the colour of the cover, the only change you will see in January will be the reintroduction of 'London Midland' to describe what is currently the 'North Western and Midland' operations area. This brings it into line with all other National Network report sections in that they all now employ what is probably the commonest geographic 'currency' used by RCTS members when considering

British railway geography. Some may consider this a retrograde step, but unlike the transient definitions which followed from the mid 90's, the 'regional hook' provided a recognisable geographic shorthand for the best part of fifty years, the period during which most of us grew up making it much more user friendly than subsequent definitions.

Finally to the Editorial team. None of us are getting any younger and we are always seeking new recruits to join the team. We have had a couple of minor changes to the line up over the past year and one or two other members have expressed a desire to move on when we have suitable replacements. Therefore please get the message out – we can only continue to maintain our existing standard if we have continuing active support of you – the members. As ever, the only qualifications are an interest in railways, an awareness of what is happening in a particular area of activity whether functional or geographic, and a willingness to become involved with a team of like minded individuals.

As with all walks of modern life the RO editorial task is essentially a computer based operation and candidates should at least have access to a computer and email. Please do your utmost to get the message out. To borrow Lord Kitcheners Great War exhortation ' We need you!'

Finally thanks to everyone who has helped the Editorial team to achieve its objectives for the RO over the past year, in particular, those who have submitted articles and photos for the first time, and a big thank you to the 40 or so members of the Editorial Team for their unstinting support in ensuring we continue to promptly deliver what I am sure you will agree is an interesting well produced magazine every month.

Ronnie McAdam (16090) suggested that a model railway section is included. In response Mike Robinson said it could be included providing a volunteer can be found. He then asked those present for if they would like to see such a section included. The response was that of indifference to a significant number being against such an idea.

Paul Udey (15907) said the highlight of the RO is the Infrastructure Section and offered his thanks to the Editor, Phil Deaves.

Mike Robertson (20991) asked about the progress with the *New Build* series of articles. Mike Robinson replied that 19 / 20 such projects were in progress and he had contacted them to see if they would like to submit an article for publication in the RO to publicise their efforts. So far five or six had been received all of which have been published. He added that he needed to chase the others.

Mike Robinson (10606) said that a topic omitted from his report was the intention not to produce a printed version of the RO index in 2015, instead it will be available as a pdf from the RCTS website. The main reason behind this was to reduce costs. Bob Barby (5843) said that he was unhappy with this development while Callum MacLeod (12817) added that he could print his own index, David Kelso (4827) reminded everyone that all ROs are now available as pdfs which make them all searchable anyway. Gordon Davies said that as there was no major objection then this would be implemented as planned.

6. Website Web 4 Project – Report by David Kelso (Web 4 Project Leader)

Since the decision was made earlier this year by the MC to investigate the development of a new website based on the recommendation of the Development Sub Committee I have been handing over the activities of the Publicity function to Peter Fortune who has recently been appointed the Society Publicity Officer. This has been made easier by the fact that we have no new book launch this autumn but I have assured Peter of my support next year when we launch Class 5s Volume 2. I

shall also be divesting myself from all my South East branch functions by the end of this year to concentrate on the Web 4 Project.

The Web4 Project is a major exercise and to give you some idea of the scope of the project on the present site there are some 1,200 plus pages of information not including Publications and the RO. In addition there are 15,000 plus photo images on the site excluding the Photo Archive of approx. 30,000 plus images.

As with everything to do with IT the developments over the last few years have moved so fast that what was state of the art web software 8 years ago is now not fit for purpose. Now we are limited as to what we can do to enhance the present site further and there are some things we wish to do that are just not possible with the present site software.

To start up the project a working group has been formed consisting of our present Webmaster, David Jackman and Mike Robinson, David Goddard, Jack Knights and myself. The initial task of the Group was to define what the Society required from a new website and also to define the age group we should be aiming at. The Group has met three times since May and I have also had a meeting with BlueGreen who developed the present website along with the New Image project 8 years ago. The Group's next meeting in November will be with the regular Web Sub Committee.

As a result of our work so far we are about to make recommendations to the MC that

- 1 - The site should have three main functions, a) provide services to members, b) be used as a membership recruitment tool, c) be used as a publicity tool.

- 2 - The site should be aimed at those in the 40 to 45 age group and upward.

- 3 - We should not attempt to make the site "Information Rich" as we do not see us having the resources within the Society to set up and maintain such pages. Developments in this area have overtaken us in the last few years notably by such sites as RTT. We cannot compete with the abundance of real time information now available on the Internet.

- 4 - We are of the view that in to-day's IT world the Society will not have the resources to maintain and technically develop the site. This must be done by professionals. The Society would not have a Webmaster, as we have known this position in the past instead. Instead we would have a "Web Editor" whose roll will be something akin to the roll of the RO Managing Editor." In this roll he will be responsible for the content of the site and the uploading of new content assisted by a number of members and the branches. With the software available to day uploading and editing of material on the site will be a much easier task.

- 5 - We have come to the conclusion that as a group we do not have the resource or time to compile a detailed specification for the new site against which a number of web design houses would be able to compete for the job a of building the new site. Nor do we have the resources, expertise or time to find such design houses, assess their competence and compare their offers in detail. We are of the view that we should again utilise the resources of BlueGreen. We know them, and they know us. We have been very satisfied with the work they have done for the Society in the past and most importantly the person who designed our present site is still with them and would be assigned the job of building the new site.

You may well ask when is all this going to happen. Assuming the MC accept our recommendations and decide to go ahead we would hope to be able to show you the new Home Page at the 2015 AGM and our target would be to launch some new pages 12 months from now.

In conclusion may I say that some time ago our present webmaster advised the MC that because of job commitments he would not be able to devote as much time to the present website as he had

done in the past. He has enthusiastically supported the concept of a new website and is giving the working group his wholehearted support and technical expertise.

We intend that the new site will be the best railway society site on the web alongside the Railway Observer now considered by many both inside and outside the Society as the best railway society magazine currently available.

Alan Sattenstall (21211) suggested that the Society sets up a Facebook page and Twitter account to divert people to the new site. In response David Kelso said that the new site would have a Facebook facility built in to it. He added that the new site would be assembled using the Concrete 5 web content management system that will make it suitable for all operating system. A web editor instead of a Webmaster will run the new site – Bluegreen would undertake any changes in operating system.

John Holloway (21878) said that the Society needs to make more use of Facebook. In reply David Kelso (4827) said that to do this more help would be required. Mike Robinson (10606) suggested that the Society needs a Facebook and Twitter champion. After some thought John Holloway said that he could take on that role, (amidst much applause).

7. Publications Sub committee – Report from David Bird, presented by Gordon Davies

My apologies for not being able to be present at Llandudno as I am in Holland on holiday.

Since my last report the main priority has been the change to the manner in which we deal with orders. This we call the 'Storage and Despatch' (S&D) element of the book publication process. This was brought about by the retirement of our 'Sales Officer' Mike Robertson. He had indicated his wish to retire by giving us nine months notice of his intention at the beginning of the year. I would like to take the opportunity of extending my thanks and on behalf of the Society its thanks to Mike for 10 years of tireless dedicated service in this vital post. All carried out in a very professional manner. Thanks again, Mike.

Being unable to source a volunteer from within the society ranks we had to turn our thoughts to another idea – outsourcing the job including the book stock. After enquiries had been made by the committee members it was agreed that the S&D job would be granted to Messrs Book Law of Nottingham. The agreement was made, signed and the stock collected and delivered to Nottingham where it is allocated its own special storage space and building. The move took place on 16th/23rd September and therefore all orders received by RCTS by whatever means are despatched by Book Law by our request. This applies to orders by branches and a new BRANCH order form has been prepared and issued with the "Newsletter" for branches to adopt. Peter Fortune is now the new name which members will see as the focal point for the order of all RCTS publications. One aspect of this change in handling is that we have now sold the Society portakabins. In fact the owners of the garden centre where they are placed have purchased them.

Turning to actual book progress, this is somewhat on the slow side. Progress is being made with 'Black Fives' volume 2 that we hope to deliver by the end of summer 2015. The 'Patriots' book is also progressing steadily but we are dependent on the health of the author allowing him to continue progress. Other titles in the LMS series continue to progress with a number of authors under the leadership of John Walford making slow but steady progress to fruition.

Last time I made mention of possible reprints of some titles including the '9Fs' volume. A decision has now been made not to reprint and let the title run as number printed. The 'Railways of Weardale' has been passed to the NERA for updating and publication in a new format. We have

sold the title to them for a consideration. However, our name and that of the author will still appear on the new book.

The Lancing and Isle of Wight projects are still being considered but due to the decline in our market and the book market in general they may not appear as a printed final publication but instead as a digital offering. We will consider all aspects before we make a final decision.

As ever we still seek new topics for publication so if anybody has a wish to be an author or can offer a manuscript I am always available to receive such offers. I await your approach. To end I would like to thank my colleagues on the publications for all their hard work and commitment as always in the last twelve months.

Bob Barby (5843) suggested that Mike Robertson receives an Honorary Life Membership (HLM) of the Society.

Mike Green (9297) asked about what the branches need to do regarding book returns under the new distribution arrangements. In reply, Gordon Davies said that he did not know but would find out from Peter Fortune.

Steve Ollive (14817) said that when the Windsor & Maidenhead Branch placed their last order they received the one destined for the Thames Valley Branch. Gordon Davies suggested that Steve contacts him.

John Day (8775) reported that the recent order for the Ipswich Branch was received promptly.

8. Development Sub committee – report by Eric Palmer (Development SC Chairman)

Firstly may I say that I am delighted to welcome Peter Fortune to the Development Sub Committee as Society Publicity Officer. This is a vital post which is needed to ensure that the society image is continually placed before as many rail enthusiasts as possible. We also welcome to the committee Alan Cooke, the Branch Liaison Officer, who has kindly agreed to act as minute secretary.

Without a doubt successful completion of the naming of the National Rail Power Car 43014 has been the highlight of the year. Negotiations with several rail operators has been going on for several years and eventually, mainly due to DSC member Andy Lickfold, the naming took place at Derby on 17th June. It is particularly fortunate that the name plate will be carried over wide areas of the country as the power car has already been seen in a variety of locations. Andy joined the DSC in 2009 with the specific task of displaying the society nameplate on a current locomotive and together with the help of others this has been successfully accomplished. As the task is now finished Andy has stepped down from the DSC but he assures us that he is available if needed in the future.

Another step forward has been the implementation of the digital RO. The introduction of low joining fees and the availability of payment by direct debit will certainly influence the recruitment of new members. All branch officers are urged to announce these attractive membership discounts at every meeting and at all exhibitions.

Later this year a pilot scheme will be introduced whereby it will be possible to purchase publications at the Peterborough and the Warley exhibitions using credit and debit cards. We have always felt that the lack of this facility has hampered our sales efforts at these events and we look forward to some great results from this new initiative.

Following a long and tortuous search for new premises for the society library, which closed in June 2011, work continues on the Leatherhead Station Masters house. Subject to agreement with Southern TOC and the MC it is hoped to take possession in 2015 if terms are favourable. Restoration of the outside has now been completed to a very high standard and meetings with the Railway Heritage Trust regarding the internal decoration and fitting out have taken place. Discussions concerning security and the electrical installation are in hand. The premises will be known as the Society Archive and is very conveniently approached by both road and rail.

As reported elsewhere work has started on a feasibility study which is going on to update the society website. The original website was originally set up in 2006 and is in dire need of refreshment. A small team, working as the Web 4 Project, is conducting a feasibility study to establish what improvements need to be made. The team is working to have the initial pages of the site available to present to members at the 2015 AGM and for the site to go live at the 2015 Members Weekend/Officers Conference.

Other activities include the updating of the Branch Officers handbook and the new extended range of new society clothing available on the website. The DSC is determined to ensure that the RCTS continues to enjoy the position of being Britain's Leading Railway Society.

Malcolm Hammond (17454) reported that the North East Branch now use their digital projector for advertising of local and national events during the interval at their branch meetings.

Alan Sattenstall (21211) said the FLL Branch has its own email group to publicise forthcoming meetings.

Paul Udey (15907) said that some Rail-gen websites will accept meeting information.

9. Society Finance – Report from Reg Wood (Society Treasurer)

Financial Results 2012/13 Last year your Society published a very small surplus (£1,500) on turnover of £107,200, or 1.4%. I am very pleased to report that I was able to report at the AGM that the Society has once again been given a “clean” audit by our external auditors. The primary elements of our Income are of course our Subscriptions, closely followed by our Publications Sales. Thanks go to those branches who stock and promote our Publications, and I would be very pleased to see more doing so.

Forecast Outturn 2013/14 Our financial year ends on 31 October each year. My current forecast is for a deficit this year. Bob Ellison is writing out to Branches to remind them of our accounting timetable. My message here for Branches is to please send in their returns complete and on time. Thanks in advance. I particularly invite Branches to send in claims to recover VAT they have incurred, deducting the element of VAT on their Sales, as the Society can reclaim the tax from HMRC, and pass the funds on to Branches. Last quarter alone we reclaimed almost £1,200. We also need your Publications returns and payments as soon as possible to help reduce our deficit to the minimum. The RO team have been improving the appearance, content and quality of the RO and I am sure you agree the results are very good. Building on this, the MC have decided to hold the 2015 subscription at current rates to promote the Society to potential new members. We do need new members to bridge the financial gap from this decision, so – Branches – we need you to help us pull in new members please. Remember the digital only membership offer should help!

Change of Auditors As the primary railway enthusiast society, we feel it is right to retain external auditors to confirm your Society's financial operations are robust and safeguard members funds. For many many years we have used Richardson, Watson and Co for our Audit. In our strive for value for money, we have secured a cost reduction by changing to Chartered Accountants R S

Porter and Co for the 2014 audit. Their first audited accounts will be presented to the 2015 AGM.

Transparency At the last OC I introduced - on behalf of the MC – arrangements to address the auditors concerns that the substantial society funds held by some Branches were not included in the Society's national Accounts. Overall our 30 branches were holding in excess of £60,000. I am pleased to report the arrangements – a choice to “invest” their surplus funds with the national Society in a ringfenced account for return when needed, or to obtain independent verification of their branch accounts – have been successful. I thank those branches affected for their help. When we publish our 2013/14 Accounts the invested branch balances will be shown as a separate line item.

Treasurers Skill Training We know accountancy can be challenging to Branches, and we don't expect our volunteer Branch Treasurers to be expert accountants. To help them, we have organised training events and developed guidance notes. Should Treasurers who missed the training be interested in attending a future event, or if you change your Treasurer, Bob Ellison would be pleased to hear from them.

Direct Debit Membership Renewal Your Management Committee is always seeking to reduce overheads. One new introduction has been the Direct Debit facility for payment of members subscriptions. I am pleased that this was successfully implemented for our 2014 subscription renewal campaign. Its benefit is that members will not have to think about renewing and actually taking the trouble to send in their cheque – once they have set it up it just runs on smoothly with no member effort. We already have 330 members paying this way – we would like to see Branches recommending Direct Debit renewal in their meeting announcements.

Our Treasurers team comprises myself together with Bob Ellison on Branch financial matters, and Noel Machell on Publications matters. I thank Bob and Noel for their invaluable support throughout the year.

Steve Ollive (14817) reported that all the renewal letters had been sent out and so far two additional members had taken up the Direct Debit option.

10. Regional Meetings – report from Alan Cooke. (Branch Liaison Secretary)

In 2014 the 13th round of Regional Meetings were held, It had been previously announced after the 2013 meetings that the option was available for them to be annual or biennial in the future. As a result only four meetings were held instead of the usual five. Unlike the early days when there were a number of contentious issue to discuss we are in a situation whereby the topics for discussion are coming from myself because most of the groups are not coming up with anything. Does this mean that everyone is content?

The summary of the meetings was again put in a spreadsheet format that worked well last year. I hope you have all read and fully digested the detail to be found. As you can see there are no contentious issues or gems of wisdom. So maybe the reasons behind the setting up of these meetings are no more so to make them viable they need to be reinvented.

The MC is looking at ways to regain the vitality of the earlier meetings and is looking for new ideas, formats and topics. If you want them to truly reflect your wishes then please be proactive and let me or Gordon or myself know.

Thanks are due to the Regional Meetings Chairmen: Robert Warburton, Callum Macleod, Mike Green, Rodney Allen and Ian Derrick for their able organisation of these events. Unfortunately Callum is standing down, so an extra thank you to you, I look forward to working with your successor.

Bob Ballard (10372) said that the Northern Home Counties Group had started asking the branches present to make a presentation about their progress and accomplishments during the past year. Gordon Davies replied that such developments might be included in 2015 round of meetings.

11. Library Sub committee – David Pick (Library Sub committee Chairman)

As reported at the 2014 Annual General Meeting at Coventry the acting “Caretaker” Librarian Peter King continues to look after the Library activities and the current premises based at Uxbridge and he reports that it has now been cleared of items surplus to requirements. Recently, back numbers of the Society magazine The Railway Observer were offered free to members for the price of covering the post and packaging. A significant number of members took up that offer to complete their individual collections. The remaining surplus to requirements magazines has now been recycled. The Society has of course kept mint copies at the Library of all the years of publication for archive use. During the forthcoming months a number of slightly soiled and out of print Society publications will become available to members on a “first come, first served” basis in a similar manner although there will be a basic charge.

Uxbridge: The Library premises remain secure and watertight and the physical condition of the stock is being maintained, with Peter King visiting the building on a regular basis. Terry Silcock continues to maintain the library catalogue and advise with involvement and interest.

Books forwarded to the Society for review in The Railway Observer are afterwards forwarded to Peter King for possible addition to the Library while magazines continue to be donated to the Society Library from various sources as previously. Manuscript type material mainly notebooks and lists have been transferred to the Society Archive at Stockport under the oversight of Bob Burchell. Peter King and David Pick are currently dealing with enquiries from members addressed to the Library.

Leatherhead: During the past year the exterior restoration of the Stationmasters house has been completed. Restoration of the interior has been slow, but I feel we can now begin to see light at the end of the tunnel. David Kelso, Peter King and I have made five visits Leatherhead and one to the Southern Railway offices at East Croydon (to meet with the Leatherhead project Construction Consultants) over the past year, with a further meeting between interested parties planned for Wednesday, 5th November which will involve Southern, Surrey County Council, Mole Valley District Council, The Railway Heritage Trust (RHT), TTPP the Construction Consultants and the Society. The main agenda item being “the listed building proposal for Leatherhead”.

In January last we met with RHT to determine the extent of restoration required to the interior of the building. Subsequently, an onsite LSC meeting was held to prepare a preliminary report on how the current layout of the building might be best used for archive research with regard to shelving and furniture. This has now been transformed into a draft plan by a firm of Library Design and Furniture Consultants together with the positioning of electrical points for heat and power etc. A specialist company dealing in secondary glazing security for listed buildings has also addressed security issues in connection with the four ground floor windows.

Photographic Archive: The collection currently has approximately 44,000 listings in black and white as well as colour. In addition there are several thousands negatives and slides awaiting review and selection. Currently seven members sort through the collections discarding non railway subjects and material that is not of an acceptable standard, before captioning those for final consideration of being added to the archive. We are indebted to the team undertaking this painstaking task of Patrick Carey, David Cole, Trevor Davis, Robert Llewellyn, Graham Onley and Vic Woods. The eighth member John Broughton is also responsible for the processing of orders.

Mike Robertson (20991) asked if it was planned to have computer facilities at Leatherhead. In reply David Pick (7342) said that such facilities would be available on the first floor.

Les Nixon (13644) stated that the SFD Branch is sitting on a time bomb because it has 333,000 images bequeathed to it. What about all of the other branches? David Pick replied that he already has eight going through the images in the archive but needed more. He added that the archive is kept under controlled temperature and humidity.

Jeremy Harrison (16096) asked if the sorted images are available from the archive. David Pick said not yet.

12. Date and Venue for 2015 Officers Conference

Irene Rabbitts announced that the 2015 Members Weekend and Officers' Conference would be held over the weekend of 23rd – 25th October 2015. We will be based at the Golden Thistle Hotel that is near Cheltenham.

The 2015 AGM would take place at the Welcome Centre in Coventry on 18th April.

13. Any other competent business

1. Bob Ballard (10372) announced that the new 2015 application forms are now available – please get in touch for your branch stock.
2. David Elsdon (18799) announced that banners and black tablecloths are available for branches to use at exhibitions. He also has 1940s ROs available for £2-50/year.
3. Callum MacLeod (12817) enquired about progress in finding a new Society President. In reply Gordon Davies said that all those contacted so far had been too busy. He added that he was still awaiting a contact from the latest candidate.

Meeting closed at 12.10hrs