



Minutes of the Officers' Conference

**Sunday 23 October 2022 at
Novotel, 25b Friary Street, Reading RG1 1DP**

Please note that the full list of those present and apologies given are included at the end of the minutes as Appendix 1.

1 Opening of Conference by Society Chairman

Conference was opened by Society Chairman Callum MacLeod promptly at 09.15 as there was the usual tight schedule for the day. The Chairman welcomed those who were attending Conference for the first time Rob Burrige (23721 – Croydon & South London), John Godfrey (15911 – Solent), Stuart Hicks (17568 – Thames Valley). He also wished Robert Bartlett OBE a Happy 70th Birthday (16275 - Cambridge). And he thanked Phil Darlaston (20341 - Thames Valley) for sorting out the arrangements for the wonderful time at Didcot Railway Centre on the previous day.

Available at Conference was a small quantity of RCTS headed paper from David Goddard and RCTS name badges from Irene Rabbits.

2 Apologies for Absence

As there was a long list of apologies these were not read out but would be included in the minutes as Appendix 1. Three Trustees had tendered apologies including Reg Wood who was recovering in hospital after a serious operation. There was a card for everyone to sign to wish Reg and his wife Jacky well. Eight Trustees were present. No further apologies were received at the Conference.

3 President's Address

The Reverend Canon Brian Arman (15672 – Bristol Branch) thanked everyone for coming and hoped that they had enjoyed the weekend and would enjoy the visit to Fawley Hill in the afternoon. It was a great place but he had ecclesiastical commitments so could not attend himself this time. He thanked everyone for what they had done to set up the weekend.

The RCTS faces challenges – at branch level it is hard to get people to commit to jobs so how can we help with this? Brian gave examples of how he had dealt with this as a parish priest and what has worked at his own branch. We are reaching a high-water mark after Covid as we are now going to places again, there is support for those doing things and great optimism going forward. He is looking forward to working with the new Society Chair when Callum steps down.

4 Confirmation of the 2022 Minutes

There were no comment or matters arising. Acceptance was proposed by Tom Kolisch (22316 – Surrey), seconded by Denis Horsman (22099 – about to move from Thames Valley to Solent) and unanimously agreed by all present.

5a) Volunteers at Branch and National Level

Notes were circulated with the agenda beforehand about the difficulties with recruitment (of officers) and there was much discussion on what Brian Arman had said earlier with examples of the difficulties and successes at various branches. It was clear that there is still an issue with meeting attendances not yet reaching pre-Covid levels and this can limit opportunities to recruit as can a widely dispersed membership where the majority cannot attend in person meetings. Opportunities for branch members to help at meetings without having to join the branch committee were also discussed. There was also brief mention of the pros and cons of afternoon and evening meetings with afternoons tending to exclude younger members in paid employment. Other societies have issues too but there is a perception that everybody (in the RCTS) is 'old', emphasising the need to include younger people who are seen as engaging more online. The importance of keeping in touch with members and following up those who are not attending was reiterated, together with talking to everyone and making sure they are welcomed in at meetings. Age is clearly an issue particularly at some branches with examples given about aging branch and committee members. There also needs to be a variety of subjects on offer and a need to ensure that the RCTS becomes much better known.

Richard Neale (9339 – Cheltenham and RO Editorial Team) raised awareness of the importance of maintaining good relationships with other organisations where we may chase the same people for membership. We used to be more active in taking the branch to the membership and benefited from the activities of Leslie Lapper (one of the RCTS's founding members) getting people enthused.

5 b) Induction for new branch officers – and national officers

Robert Bartlett is seeking a new fixtures secretary and felt that this section in the Officers Handbook makes it sound rather daunting and might put a candidate off. A simple and straight forward induction process could make it more attractive especially if presented in a way that they feel is possible for them. Stuart Hicks (17568 – Thames Valley) suggested that a fixtures volunteer might only wish to do part of the role and felt that the manual needs to be more explicit about the flexibility of branch committee roles.

Induction could be done by Zoom as previous successful web training sessions had been done. There was no reason that meetings and/or induction and training sessions could not be done using a mix of Zoom and in person, enabling people to talk to each other, sharing lessons. The possibility of a mentoring system was suggested with new officers benefiting from the support of more experienced officers.

While a digression from the agenda item, it was stated that overall we need to become more visible and encourage more visits as these are an attraction, something that the Society used to do more of. Younger people are interested in railways so a way to engage them would be good. A good percentage of new sign ups had renewed last year.

It was generally agreed that those present would prefer a simpler form of the Officers Handbook. The web training videos produced by Matthew Shaw were agreed as being very useful.

5 c) Financial support for less well-off branches

This subject had been raised by one of the branches complaining about the cost of travel and overnight accommodation for the Officers' Conference. Although the Branch Liaison Officer had circulated a reminder to all branches prior to conference about potentially claiming expenses for attendance, a complaint had been received that a branch with uncommitted funds only just over the limit did not qualify. The limit had been set some years ago and prices had increased considerably since then. Those officers present at the meeting supported the idea of reviewing the limit in principle and asked that it be considered at a subsequent Trustee meeting.

6 Publications Update

As David Bird (13905 – Trustee, Publications Officer) had given his apologies for the meeting, the report was read out by Callum MacLeod. The full report is included as Appendix 2 to these minutes. There was some discussion about publications already in the pipeline, other subjects under consideration and what might or might not be good subjects going forward. There are difficulties sometimes in finding suitable authors.

Before stopping for the refreshment break, the chairman reminded everyone about the donation tins for the photographic archive project with just over £200 already raised at the dinner the evening before – a good result given that there had been no prior warning; but one tin was empty so more donations would be welcome. When asked, it was confirmed that branches could contribute towards the project too. It was agreed that a note would go out in the next Officers' Newsletter.

REFRESHMENT BREAK

7 Digital

After the break Matthew Shaw explained that his title had changed from Webmaster to Digital Officer because his role was broader than just maintaining the website, and outlined what would be covered under each item. 7 a) the RCTS Newsletter; using emails for renewals; the website; photo competitions. 7 b) three digitisation projects: the LNER series; historical ROs becoming available online; the photographic archive project. 7 c) questions and answers.

7 a) Website and Email

The first RCTS Newsletter had gone out in August 2021 with its main purpose to announce that the electronic RO had been published (note - this had been requested in the past but Matthew has now made it happen). The Newsletter has evolved to include speedy reporting on events eg Barrow Hill although there are challenges in using email to contact over 2000 people. The Society is now at the stage where it is possible to do renewals via email for those who have given an email address. This will be quicker, save postage costs and there will be far less work 'stuffing envelopes'. It is a complicated process with many different types of membership and Matthew has worked closely with the Membership Secretary and Assistant Treasurer Renewals to replicate the process via email. Gift Aid declarations can now be done online as can signing up for Direct Debit. The benefit of using the new system is that a new member can sign up for Direct Debit straight away.

The website is currently a relatively small part of the job and the training videos have already been mentioned. One of the benefits is that anyone can go through them at leisure. Most branches are doing 'OK' updating their branch web pages with a couple of people helping other branches (a form of mentoring – see 5 b above) as Matthew cannot do everything personally.

There have been two photo competitions to date – one for members to choose from a selection of photographs that have appeared in the *RO*, the other of photographs submitted from the Barrow Hill event. There are plans for a big photographic competition in conjunction with a commercial magazine next year.

Last year it was important to get branches to be more self-reliant in using Zoom so additional licences were bought. Zoom use has dropped off but if we have the licences we need to use them.

7 b) Digitisation Projects

Matthew showed a copy of one of the newly digitised LNER books – printed via Amazon. This opens up RCTS publications to a global market. There are no stock costs so this is financially worthwhile for the Society as well as reaching a wider market.

Matthew now has a copy of all the *ROs* in digital form. However, there is still work to be done to turn the scans into a more usable format that is easier to search and additional processing is required before the historic *ROs* can be made available.

The photographic archive is an exciting new project supported by the Trustees with money from central funds promised to match what members donate, and Gift Aid potentially providing an additional boost. The Society has in excess of 100,000 images still awaiting processing - in various formats from glass plates, prints, slides, to digital images. Proposals are in place to use the facility at Leatherhead as the project base, with much work to do, the right equipment to be bought, and more volunteers needed to make the best use of the equipment. Once the imaging has been completed, some subsequent work can be done remotely which will include selection and processing of images. In this way the project can benefit from the huge amount of knowledge and expertise amongst the membership. Matthew provided more details of the proposals and the reason for the project, not least the vision and opportunity it presents for the RCTS, especially in meeting our Constitutional Objectives as an educational charity as well as making the Society more visible to a wider public.

7 c) Questions and Answers

The need for up-to-date email addresses for members was highlighted and Callum MacLeod agreed to include the request in Talking Points. There were also questions about on-going use of Zoom and did the Society now need fewer licences. The subject of photographic bequests being split between the Society and other beneficiaries was discussed and the issue of captions.

John Redgate (13470 – Trustee) asked if it were possible to record the Zoom talks and make them available on the website. There followed some discussion on the pitfalls - including the permission of the speaker and copyright of images shown. A question was raised about charging remote attendees for Zoom or hybrid meetings, because branches who use the hybrid format in particular, are not raising enough money to cover their meeting expenses. A charge would mean paying VAT but it was argued that would be better than not receiving any payment.

8 Social Media update

The good news is that a volunteer Tim Bellenger has come forward and agreed to take on Social Media for the RCTS. He has a very low membership number inherited from his father and has already started work setting up a twitter account which by today (23 October 2022) has 183 followers. It is hoped this will encourage younger people; there are plans to expand activities including reinvigorating the existing Facebook account as well as mentoring local branches in how to use social media to avoid the possible pitfalls. It is hoped that this will help update the Society's profile and make it more relevant in the present day. Members are encouraged to join in.

9 Any Other Business

The photographic competition with photographs from the *RO* has been won by Ian Pilkington who wins free membership for a year.

9 a) Andrew Lait has requested photographs of 69003 (named *The Railway Observer* at Barrow Hill) while in service, and also for 43014 carrying the NR slogan. His contact details are in the Officers' Directory as part of the *RO* team.

9 b) Malcolm Hammond was concerned about the loss of several prominent members recently and the risk of losing the knowledge and expertise when current members pass away. He would like to see a history section set up that could be expanded over time. Some work has already been done in this area by Terry Silcock for the Society's 75th anniversary but what currently exists is fairly basic and is not in the public domain. A volunteer is required to coordinate the project and Andy Davies said 'well volunteered Malcolm'. Andy also asked everyone to look at the group photographs he had placed on display over the weekend, in order to identify the people present.

9 c) Zoom costings were discussed further. Hybrid meetings enable distant members to attend but lower numbers are attending in person with the financial implications for the branches - see Item 7 c). Branch meetings need to be financially viable and it was asked if the Zoom link could be set up in such a way that remote attendees cannot access it until they have paid. VAT would be applicable. Matthew Shaw confirmed the possibility and suggested an experiment with one or two branches to see how it goes. It was pointed out that it might be appropriate to involve the finance group. David Goddard (21347 – Trustee, Membership Secretary, Windsor & Maidenhead) said there might be a trade off with fewer remote attendees but the possibility of a higher level of donations overall. John Redgate suggested that it be trialled by Windsor & Maidenhead and Surrey branches and both readily agreed.

9 d) James Milne (23069 – Trustee, Development Officer, Strategy Group Leader) confirmed that talks have been held between Paul Chancellor (not present but part of the Strategy Group) with Morton's (commercial magazines) about a photographic competition for 2023. There are also thoughts about a special members' day for 2023 as there had excellent exposure from the Barrow Hill event; Beachy Head was mentioned.

10 Date and Venue for next year's Members' Weekend and Officers' Conference

Callum suggested Durham might be a good idea as it was agreed that the event needs to be much further north next time. A coordinator is required. Support from branches closer to that area would be greatly appreciated. The Members' Weekend and Officers' Conference is usually held around the 3rd or 4th weekend in October.

11 Date and venue for 2023 Society AGM

This is booked for 22 April 2023 at Wolverhampton as in 2022, planned to be a hybrid meeting to open it up to more members.

12 Closing Remarks

Callum MacLeod commented that it had been a 'nice friendly chat'. Previous Officers' Conferences had been a bit dull but he was very pleased that those present had got involved in the discussions. He thanked everyone for attending and said how useful everyone present had been in contributing.

Appendix 1

Officers' Conference Attendance and Apologies

Branch	Abbreviation	Present	Apologies given
Bristol	BTL	Canon Brian Arman	Reg Wood (T)
		Tony Horstman	Paul Udey
Cambridge	CBR	Robert Bartlett	
Cheltenham	CHM	Richard Morris (T)	Stephen Wilson
		Richard Neale	
Chichester	CHR	Roger Sandford	Geoff May
Croydon & Sth London	CSL	Jeremy Harrison	Chris Meredith
		Rob Burridge *	Peter Wilson
East Midlands	EMD		Robin Gibbons
			Dave Coxon
			Rodney Allen
South Essex	ESX		David Couzens-Howard
			David Cope
			Iain Scotchman
			Rodger Green
			Geoff Brockett
			Chris Ignatowicz
Furness, Lakes & Lune	FLL		Alan Sattenstall
			David Bousfield
			John Owen
			Wil Gibson
Humberside	HSD		Carey Vessey
Hitchin & Welwyn Garden City		Steve Lacey	Paul Holloway
Ipswich	IPS		Bev Steele
			Dave Beecroft
			John Day
			Chris Ignatowicz
			Nigel Moffitt
Lancs & North West	LNW		
Merseyside, Cheshire & Nth Wales	MCNW		
Windsor & Maidenhead	MHD	Steve Ollive	Alan Cooke
		Sally Goddard	John Fitzgerald
		David Goddard (T)	Bob Horner
Milton Keynes	MKY	Mark Richards	Steve Dexter
North East	NEA	Malcolm Hammond	Jim Sedgwick
			Margaret Fraser
			Tony Skinner
Northampton	NHN		
Peterborough	PBR	Colin Conway	
Scottish	SCT		Ken Falconer
			James Harrold
			Richard Thorburn
			Ronnie McAdam
Sheffield	SFD	Jim Bryant	Derek Stuckey
			Alan Hardman
			Robert Pritchard

Solent	SOE	John Godfrey*	Peter Ifold
			Dave Doulton
South Wales	SWL		Peter Fortune
			Jeremy Segrott
			Steve Rickett
Surrey	SRY	Andy Davies (T)	Bob Ellison
		Irene Rabbitts (T)	Peter Bosomworth
		Tom Kolisch	
Thames Valley	TVY	Denis Horsman	Andrew Jenkins
		Phil Darlaston	Gordon Adams
		Stuart Hicks*	
West of England	WEN		
Watford	WFD	Geoff Plumb	Rob Davidson
West Midlands	WMD		
West Riding	WRD		CW Jagger
			WR Green
			J Holroyd
			MJ Holt
			DV Beeken
National Officers not already mentioned above			
RO Team			Andrew Lait
Development Officer		James Milne (T)	
Society Chairman		Callum MacLeod (T)	
Digital Officer		Matthew Shaw (T)	
Trustee		John Redgate (T)	
Publications Officer			David Bird (T)
RO Editor			Mike Robinson (T)
Social Media Officer			Tim Bellenger

Names marked with an * attended Conference for the first time

Names marked (T) are RCTS Trustees

All names on the sign-in sheets at Conference are listed as attending. If you have not signed the sheet but were present at Conference, please let me know. All apologies received prior to the date of Conference are listed. If you have given your apologies but your name is not listed, please contact me so that we can work out what might have gone wrong and correct it. Thank you.

Irene Rabbitts (20072 – Branch Liaison Officer and Surrey Branch)

Appendix 2

PUBLICATIONS REPORT FOR CONFERENCE 2022

SALES NEWS FOR THE PAST YEAR (NOVEMBER 2021-OCTOBER 2022)

In this period the Society has moved in excess of 900 books resulting from strong sales of the Mensing album although sales slowed down in the summer. The arrival of the Royal Scot book in August meant that sales built up again and the new title had the effect of encouraging sales of other titles too. Sales of the of the Scot book reached 382 between August and the date of this report. Other titles in the catalogue continued to sell slowly.

TITLES PUBLISHED

Due to demand, a further 100 copies of the Mensing album were printed - early in the period mentioned. Sales continue but now of a trickle nature. Again, due to demand, a further 25 copies of each of Volume 1 and Volume 3 of the Standard series of books were reprinted having already had one additional print run. I am pleased to advise that sales still continue for the whole series.

As mentioned above we finally received the Scot book in late July. 750 were ordered and 763 delivered. Sales continue steadily. The book has recovered its cost price and is now in profit. It seems that the sales will now follow the pattern of our other titles and slow down to a slow steady basis or 'trickle' as I call the sales.

Due to Mathew Shaw's efforts we have been able to offer the whole series of the LNER titles either as a PRINT version or available as a digital download. The original books were all scanned and enhanced size-wise, including the pictures. No amendments were made to the books. They were taken down from 19 books into 8 larger volumes. The print facility is via the Amazon route where it is 'print to order'. Obviously we pay them a fee for their service, but RCTS does not, of course, tie up large sums of money as in normal print type books. This service has just started but initial signs are encouraging.

FUTURE PRINTING of TITLES

The COWLISHAW album is currently with the chosen printers for printing. It is expected to be complete by 31 October 2021. We will therefore be placing it on sale during November.

FUTURE WORKS

The first generation DMUs title is complete. Pictures have been chosen and prepared for publication, the compilers have completed the detailed introductions for each class of DMU and detailed captions are almost finalised. The final outlay will shortly be completed and then quotes obtained for printing. I do not expect to achieve a print run until early in the new year and I may delay that decision until spring time.

OTR (Observing The Railway) 2022 and beyond. The pictorial annual project has proceeded to be worked up for potential publication and a 2021 draft has been prepared for those interested. RO contributors and members of the Photographic Portfolio have been circulated with a digital copy of this idea. Generally this idea received support and we proceed to work forward with a 2022 version. As the title suggests this is, of course, ongoing. The work will feature images offered to the RO but not utilised because of the amount available to the RO team. We are also hoping to encourage others, not able to meet the RO timescales, to offer their work to us for use in the Annual which will not, of course, have such tight timescales.

The intention is to launch the project with the 2022 membership renewal process so that all will be aware of the project. We are looking at members registering an interest (like a pre-order) so that we

can measure the requirement for a print run. It will be a hardback book using the same dimensions as with The Journey, Mensing and Cowlshaw albums.

Matthew can provide further information should this be requested.

The 8F project has received a boost in that John Walford has returned to team to lend his considerable knowledge to the work going forward.

Others works remain in the discussion and building stage.

David Bird

18th October 2022