

BRANCH LIAISON OFFICER

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Officers' Newsletter 234

17 September 2024

Dear All

This Officers' Newsletter is mostly about the Officers' Conference which is scheduled to take place on Sunday 29 October 2024 at the Royal Maritime Hotel, 75-80 Queen Street, Portsmouth, PO1 3HS at 09.15 prompt.

Officers Conference

Officers' Conference Agenda

This is attached as Appendix 1 to this Newsletter.

Attendance at Conference (Present/Apologies)

Although you do not have to book your place at Conference in advance, it is really helpful to know who is likely to attend and who is tendering apologies for not being able to attend. So please let me know if you plan to attend or if you are giving your apologies. You can email me at liaison@rcts.org.uk using Officers' Conference attendance/apologies in the subject line. This makes it easier for me to filter out the correct information. I already have some apologies and attendance notifications but I would much rather receive this a second time than not at all.

Whilst the majority of those present are likely to be Branch Officers, ALL Society Officers are welcome to attend and join in discussions.

Reclaiming expenses for attending Conference

This is a good opportunity to remind Branches that expenses can be claimed for one Branch Officer to attend Conference provided that the Branch has uncommitted funds of less than £2000.00.

Active Volunteer Recognition (AVR)

It is that time of year again when we ask for AVR nominations from the Branches – up to two per Branch. This is in recognition of what all the volunteers do to help keep the Branches running for the benefit of all their Members. The nominees can be Committee Members but this is not essential if you have a particular member who is always helping without becoming a member of the Branch Committee. You are free to choose and it does not have to be the same Members each year. You can also choose to opt out of nominating anyone for AVR, if you prefer.

AVR applies to other aspects of RCTS activities so this is a reminder for leaders of other RCTS activities whether this is the RO team, the Governance Groups, the website or any other RCTS areas of activity. You also need to submit your AVR nominations as soon as possible.

If you are not sure about AVR nominations please ask.

The information contained in this newsletter is for use of RCTS Officers and Members only and should not be communicated outside of the Society

Website Revamp

The main website was released three years ago (November 2021), and is getting ready for a refresh and tidy-up. The navigation is not as intuitive as we would like and the Homepages need to load more quickly, but overall it does most of the things required for our Society. Officers will be invited to take part in a review of what needs doing, expected to start mid-October. Even for those who do not personally use the website much, our Digital Officer has requested a diversity of views on how we present information to the general public, Members, customers, researchers etc. The aim is to collate views within the next 2-3 weeks in order to have time to make the changes for January 2025.

Look out for more information from our Digital Officer next month.

Branch Attendance Returns

Please note, these should now be sent to our Society Chairman James Milne – chairman@rcts.org.uk. I will forward those already received to James for logging and processing. Do not forget to make this part of your post-meeting activities so that it becomes routine. You all sign members and guests in at meetings so we would like this to be something easy for you to do. Any constructive suggestions about improving the system would be welcome. Be assured that James will chase at the end of every month if you have not supplied him with numbers in a short email.

Thank you to those who have already started sending their attendance returns in regularly, this is much appreciated.

Revised New Members Process

Please note that with the changes to recruitment with the majority of new member applications now being online, Vron has stepped down from her former role of Assistant Treasurer New Members. This is in line with the changes towards more digital processing.

Please ensure that any old/out of date paperwork that includes Vron's contact details for new members should be withdrawn and not used with immediate effect.

In future all new member applications will be processed by the Membership Secretary David Goddard membership@rcts.org.uk.

Progress Report on discussions with the Stephenson Locomotive Society

In case you have not read "Talking Points" in the September 2024 issue of *The Railway Observer*, please find attached at Appendix 2 a transcript of our Chairman's statement.

Please draw this to the attention of every Member present at your next Branch meeting, together with the full content. Any query should be directed to our Chairman, James Milne at chairman@rcts.org.uk.

Thank you for reading this and I look forward to meeting as many of you as possible at the Officers' Conference in Portsmouth on Sunday 29 September 2024.

Kind regards

Irene

Appendix 1



OFFICERS' CONFERENCE

Sunday 29 September 2024 at 9.00am for 9.15am start

The Royal Maritime Hotel
75-80 Queen Street
PORTSMOUTH
PO1 3HS

AGENDA

1	Opening of Conference by Society Chairman	James Milne
2	Apologies for Absence	Irene Rabbitts
3	Confirmation of OC 2023 Minutes (circulated with Officers' Newsletter – 229 March 2024)	James Milne
4	HEALTH & SAFETY Policy, Risk Assessments, Practical applications (bring your Branch Venue Risk Assessment with you even if it only partially complete)	Callum MacLeod Branch Officers
5	FINANCE To include Bank Charges, Finance Forms, Financial Timetable and Q&As	Reg Wood Chris Basford
	BREAK (20 minutes)	
6	COMMERCIAL GROUP updates To include publications, and Loco Database	David Bird
7	STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENTS To include Outside Visits and Rail 200 update	David Cross
8	ADMINISTRATION To include a discussion of Website improvements	Richard Morris
9	BRANCHES To include discussion on Constructing a Branch Meeting programme; and Branch concerns and difficulties	James Milne Branch Officers
10	CHAIRMAN To include an update on talks with The SLS	James Milne
11	2025 Members' Weekend - Date and Venue for Members Weekend and Officers' Conference	Malcolm Hammond
12	2025 Society AGM - Date and Venue	James Milne
13	Closing Remarks	James Milne

Appendix 2

May's edition of *The RO* contained a transcript of the announcement I made at our 88th AGM in Wolverhampton on 20th April 2024. Included in the rather lengthy announcement was the release to our own membership of the fact that the initial discussions between your Society and The Stephenson Locomotive Society had resulted in the signing of a formal Heads of Terms Agreement.

What this did not disclose was any specific particulars and the end result of the talks between the two Societies on closer collaboration and working together. We set out to explore the benefits of working more closely together without the constraint of an ultimate objective. However, I did say that "...a formal merger may take place".

You may be wondering why no further update has been made during the intervening 4 months since our AGM. Far from any speculative conclusion that the discussions between the two Societies have stalled, a more definite conclusion to the collaborative talks is now beginning to emerge.

From our own side, Officers and Trustees carefully investigated the amalgamation of Membership Services and a "combined" version of our own *Railway Observer* and The SLS Journal. With our confidence high that this could be achieved by the start of 2025, we shared our views with the Directors of The SLS quite recently.

However, their own status as a charitable company limited by guarantee - different from our own as a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) - creates additional regulatory hurdles and a desire from their side to seek approval for a full merger with ourselves. Formal approval from their members, as required by their Constitution, would be sought at their next AGM in May 2025.

I had a meeting with The SLS Chairman at the end of August to devise and agree a "road map" of actions required to meet these timelines, so this will mean a busy Autumn for some of our Trustees and Officers in order to ensure the smoothest of transitions for The SLS members.

So, rather than having more positive news about a piecemeal amalgamation over the next year or so, we are working towards more of a "big bang" event at the start of 2026. In this way, our discussions during the past 9 months should not be regarded as anything but a catalyst towards creating a bigger and stronger RCTS, and assure an enhanced sustainability for the future. By talking to our counterparts, we have established an inevitability that formally getting together is the only way forward.

We will have to be guided by any Charity Commission advice of course, and deal carefully with the different requirements of a charitable company limited by guarantee and our own CIO status. My fellow Trustees and I will work assiduously to ensure that the heritage, history and legacy of our Society is not compromised in any way.

What each and everyone of you as RCTS Members must realise is that the relative size and strength of our Society translates into a ratio of around 7:1 when compared with the current membership base of The SLS. When measured this way, it is self-evident that our core values and membership offer has maintained our strength in the face of significant challenges over the last few years. I am sure in that welcoming our 'brothers-in-arms', we can both preserve and grow the RCTS heritage, experience and reputation, at the same time as ensuring the artefacts and members of The SLS can find a safe home under our roof.

I want each and every RCTS member to view this opportunity of the “Stronger Together” project with the same enthusiasm as I do, but if you have any concerns or queries, please feel free to e-mail me at chairman@rcts.org.uk. I will ensure that any future developments will be publicised in these pages.

James Milne
Chairman, RCTS
28th July 2024