

BRANCH LIAISON OFFICER

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Officers' Newsletter 235

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Dear All

It is a while since the last Officers' Newsletter but there are a few things to share that you need to know about.

Digital Assets and the Society's Insurance Policy

It is the time of year when the Society needs to update the digital asset register for the Branches prior to renewing the Society's Insurance Policy to make sure that we have adequate cover in case of loss. This means it is important that the register is up to date and we have the right details for all digital equipment that the Branch may hold eg laptops, digital projectors, sound systems etc.

Even if there has been no change since November 2023, it would be helpful if you would send me a complete and up to date list of what digital equipment you hold as a Branch, to enable the list to be updated accordingly. Even if there has been no change, it will make sure that nothing was missed last year. This is important as there has been another successful claim this year when a Branch digital projector was stolen.

If your equipment is not listed, it may not be covered by the Insurance Policy should anything happen to it.

Officers' Directory – now online only

The decision has been made that this will only be available online in future because it is much easier to make any necessary changes quickly and thus keep it up to date more easily. If you, or any of your Branch members would like a printed copy, you can access it on the Members' pages of the website and download or print off a copy.

Regional Meetings Summary and Précis of the Summary

The Summary document is quite lengthy partly because of the formatting which makes it easier to read - I hope you find it interesting. It is attached as **Appendix 1** to this newsletter.

The Précis of the Summary is attached as **Appendix 2**.

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

Officers' Conference Minutes

The draft Officers Conference (OC) Minutes are ready for circulation but have not been included in this newsletter as it already includes both the Regional Meetings Summary and the Précis of the Summary, which is probably sufficient reading for one newsletter. The OC minutes will, therefore be included with the next Officers' Newsletter.

Spelling

This comes up from time to time with regards to the spelling of LIAISON and my surname RABBITTS. If either is misspelled when you send an email, I do not receive it and it does not always 'bounce back' so please take care when inputting an email address. If I have not replied, I may not have received your message.

Risk Assessments and Emergency Evacuation Checklist

Thank you to all those Branches that have already provided their Branch meeting venue Risk Assessment. There are still some outstanding and I will be chasing these up together with any outstanding Branch AGM minutes – again!

Chichester Branch has put together an Emergency Evacuation Checklist in case evacuation of the venue is required. It is short and straightforward and has been included in this newsletter for you to use and adapt to suit your needs. This is **NOT** compulsory and is attached as **Appendix 3** if you would like to use it.

Branch Attendance Statistics

Thank you to those that are now providing these regularly to Society Chairman James Milne chairman@rcts.org.uk after each Branch meeting. You will be reminded if they are not provided. However, please let James know if you have any difficulty so that the problem can be resolved quickly.

Footnote

There is quite a lot to take in at once in this newsletter and I am sorry that it has taken so long to circulate, but I hope that some of the information will be of interest, while for the rest, it is important that it is noted and acted on now ie digital assets, outstanding Branch meeting venue risk assessments, and any outstanding Branch AGM minutes.

On a bright note, I have noticed when writing up the Regional Meetings Summary, that there seems to be a much more positive attitude going forward. While this does not mean we do not have problems to resolve, there are definitely 'green shoots' largely thanks to all the hard work that all Society volunteers do. Thank you.

Kind regards

Irene



2024 Regional Meetings Summary

Introduction

All five Regional Meetings (RMs) took place this year and I am pleased that more Branches attended with only three unable to send a representative – an improvement on last year when six Branches did not attend. One of those not attending did, however, provide a report on their Branch activities for inclusion in the discussions.

1 Welcome by Chair and introduction of Delegates

All groups welcomed their Chairmen with delegates introducing themselves, including which Branch they represent.

2 Present and Apologies

Great Western: Branches represented: Bristol; Cheltenham; South Wales; Thames Valley. West of England Branch was not presented. Trustee Representative - David Bird.

London & South – all Branches represented: Chichester; Croydon & South London; Solent; Surrey; Windsor & Maidenhead. Trustee representative - Reg Wood.

Midland & North West – Branches represented: Furness, Lakes & Lune; Merseyside, Cheshire & North Wales; West Midlands. Lancs & North West gave apologies and provided a report from the Branch. Trustee Representative - Irene Rabbitts; Society Chairman James Milne was also present.

Northern Home Counties – Branches represented: Cambridge; Hitchin & Welwyn Garden City; Ipswich; Peterborough; Milton Keynes. Northampton Branch was not represented. Trustee Representative - David Goddard.

WREMNESSH – all Branches represented: East Midlands; Humberside; North East; Sheffield; West Riding. Trustee Representative - Richard Morris.

Trustee Comments/Action Points

It is still the intention that ALL Branches should be represented, if not in person, then by providing a report on their Branch activities. The option of reviewing the Regional Structure is still under consideration and there will be consultation with the Branches before any decision is made.

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3 Minutes of the Previous Regional Meeting

Great Western – accepted.

London & South – appendices were missing from the minutes but circulated after the meeting. Otherwise accepted.

Midland & North West – the misspelling of Derek Huntriss's surname was corrected. Otherwise accepted.

Northern Home Counties – the spelling of Michael Smyth's surname was corrected. Otherwise accepted.

WREMNESSH – accepted.

4 Matters Arising from Local Minutes not covered by the Agenda

Great Western – None

London & South – None

Midlands & North West – Other Branch programmes not yet exchanged

Northern Home Counties – None

WREMNESSH

- The Officers' Handbook now includes Quick Checklists in Section 2 which was very useful and less daunting;
- Sheffield – banking issues were highlighted;
- Discussion re more than one person at the Branch, to sign on to the account and deal with banking issues, is required;
- Concerns re late arrival of the printed *RO*.

Trustee Comments/Action Points

[Any queries re Branch Finances/Banking, please contact Assistant Treasurer Branches.](#)

5 Regional Meeting Action Points from 2023

Great Western – these had been circulated prior to this year's Regional Meetings via Officers' Newsletter 231;

London & South – RO inconsistent delivery eg June edition received 22 June 2024 (DH), whereas July edition arrived 2 July 2024;

Midlands & North West – nothing to report;

Northern Home Counties – noted;

WREMNESSH – noted.

6 Matters Arising from National Action Points

Great Western – None;

London & South - CHR now back up to pre-Covid attendance leading to discussion on membership and name of the Society; articles put on the Facebook page but member concerned never attends meetings; BTL had a local magazine on the web; CSL membership distribution within Branch area; comments on RCTS ads – improvement required; discussion re length of time to publish photographs on the website and in the RO compared with other organisations; no Life Memberships this year; need to encourage more people to visit the Library at Leatherhead – suggestions: Celebrity Open Day, book signing?

Midlands & North West – None

Northern Home Counties – None

WREMNESSH – Items 5 & 6 on the Agenda were felt to be confusing although most items raised have been completed. The make-up of Regional Groups and allocation of Branches (possibly impacted by closer relationship with the SLS); and Life Memberships which requires a Rule change are still outstanding.

Trustee Comments/Action Points

[A review of RM groups/branches has not yet taken place but there will be consultation.](#) [Society advertising is currently under review.](#)

7 Branch Presentations – comparing how each Branch has been doing since the last Regional Meeting

Great Western

Bristol - Numbers slightly down but Branch in reasonably good health – attendance depends significantly upon subject with locally focused, steam era presentations being popular. Book sales provide significant contribution to Branch finances but sales down particularly re second hand books. A card reader has been acquired for electronic financial transactions.

Cheltenham – a good year with financial stability; primary income from door donations at meetings plus a little from RCTS book sales, second hand book sales negligible. Good relationship/personal contacts with the Gloucestershire Warwickshire Railway.

South Wales – good year with attendance close to pre-Covid levels. Committee works well with good engagement from Branch members. Financially healthy. Bookstall considered an important part of the meeting. Electronic Right Tracks newsletter circulated widely and well respected. Indoor programme varied with efforts made to appeal to both younger and established members. Initiatives during the year included a Summer Social, South Wales based photographic competition (including a prize donated by TFW). Branch links with local 'Railways in South Wales' Facebook group. Now have a card reader for financial transactions.

Thames Valley – small but enthusiastic core of regular attendees at meetings. Feedback re speakers has been good. Numbers still not returned to pre-Covid levels – ageing membership? Branch committee positions hard to fill.

West of England – not present

Costs of banking discussed between branches present as some face banking charges whilst others do not.

London & South

Chichester – problems recruiting to Committee but members willing to carry out other duties for the Branch. Attendance back up to pre-Covid levels. Branch 'upbeat and positive' attitude.

Croydon & South London – attendance still down on pre-Covid levels so a smaller meeting room is now being used. Two long-standing committee members have stood down but a new volunteer has come forward.

Solent – concerns re meeting location with change of ownership but current bookings have been honoured. Some uncertainty going forward. Meetings are held jointly with the Mid Hants Railway whose new CEO Rebecca Dalley attended the April meeting to introduce herself. Two exhibitions attended in the last year.

Surrey – Downside is the loss of Fixtures Officer Tom Kolisch. Difficult to recruit new active committee members. Difficulties in getting speakers to confirm presentations promptly, consequently difficult to get full information into magazines for Press Date. Cost of running meetings has increased and attendance at meetings is still down on pre-Covid levels. This and losing two of four exhibitions, including the most lucrative, puts pressure on Branch day to day finances. Previous attempts at hybrid meetings unsuccessful in spite of pre-meeting testing but there are plans to try again in future.

Upside – several members willing to assist with meetings.

Windsor & Maidenhead – hybrid meetings have taken place during the year with only one 'face to face' only. Seasonal average for hybrid meetings – 20 in person and 32 on zoom. After a poor experience, the importance of finding out about a speaker and their equipment in advance of making a booking, was highlighted. Three exhibitions attended – an increase. Branch finances in surplus this year from hybrid meetings and increase in exhibitions attendance.

Midlands & North West

Furness, Lakes & Lune – meetings moved to Wednesday evenings has saved the Branch money and has not been detrimental to attendances. Attendances have not yet returned to pre-Covid levels and, with meetings running at a loss, requested door donations have been increased. There is a good indoor meetings programme with excellent speakers. The Branch Treasurer has some personal issues but Will Gibson will step in if necessary. Slightly reduced attendance is a concern but improved towards the end of the season; tight financial management, good committee skills, and a great venue are all pluses. Meeting reminders are posted on railway interest groups on Facebook etc. There will be a Branch visit to DRS Open Day, Carlisle.

Lancs & North West – downside of losing long-standing Branch Treasurer, new one appointed but other Branch committee members are also facing health problems. Branch attendances are down and not returning to pre-Covid levels. Harder to investigate and find good new speakers. Former Facebook page did not seem to attract greater attendances/interest so has been discontinued. Getting local railway enthusiasts to meetings, in spite of good speakers, has not yet been successful. Branch funds are being carefully managed with meetings moving to a cheaper venue. Ageing members is a problem. (Branch webpages have been recently greatly improved – ILR)

Merseyside, Cheshire & North Wales – the Branch has had a difficult time recently but now has a new venue for evening meetings (increased costs and parking issues at the previous venue in Chester). The Liverpool venue for afternoon meetings is unchanged. Recent committee changes have meant upheaval but the situation is now settling. Good outdoor visits continue.

West Midlands – former Branch Chairman stood down due to health problems and a new volunteer has not yet been found. However, there is a good and varied programme of indoor meetings with reasonable attendance.

Northern Home Counties

Cambridge – A successful year with meeting attendances averaging 25-30 with a full programme and a good atmosphere at meetings. The Branch has a good committee, is financially sound with no door donations requested as the income comes from book sales. The Branch has the technology for hybrid meetings.

Ipswich – A full programme of speakers for 2024 but the Branch is struggling to attract essential committee members. Help is provided by members at meetings but there is a threat to the Branch if new committee members do not come forward.

South Essex – Have a good working committee; meetings once a month all year round, most of which are now hybrid. The Branch is financially sound averaging a meeting attendance of 20.

Milton Keynes – moved to new venue in March 2023 with no hire charge. January/ February meetings are Zoom and a joint meeting with Northampton is held once a year. Attendances are good with around 60 for Zoom and 50 in person. (There is a discrepancy with meeting attendance stats provided to date - ILR) The Branch has a monthly newsletter.

Watford – there is a full meeting programme for 2024 with Zoom-only meetings in January and February. Average attendance between 20 and 24. Outdoor visits tend to be poorly supported.

Peterborough – the Branch has low meeting attendances leading to concern over finances. Problems include a need for new committee members and a widely dispersed membership.

Hitchin & Welwyn Garden City – the Branch continues to provide two live meetings per month, one at each venue, excluding August. Although Branch membership is around 106, attendances for both afternoon (Welwyn) and evening (Hitchin) meetings remain in the 20s. New lanyard name badges have been introduced for everyone attending, to promote socialising between members which has led to longer intervals. There is a monthly newsletter. The committee comprises 4 people, with member assistance at meetings. Finances are satisfactory after increasing requested door donations.

WREMNESSH

Each Branch gave a presentation and a range of interesting points were made as to the issues faced by the Branches.

West Riding – facing an uncertain future as the secretary and treasurer have both given 12 months notice to step down but no volunteers came forward at the most recent AGM so the Branch will cease to function in September if nothing changes. The Branch Liaison Officer is aware of the situation.

Scottish - has found a new venue due to increasing charges at the previous one. All future meetings are planned for afternoon rather than a mix of afternoon and evening.

North East - has been successful in attracting members from other local groups whose own meeting programmes seem to have stopped. There are no immediate plans to restart meetings in Newcastle due to insufficient volunteer support.

Sheffield - committee is working on improving attendances as these have not increased in spite of moving to a well located new venue with better facilities and parking than before. This affects Branch finances.

Humberside – apologies received for non-attendance.

There was general discussion on meeting times (afternoon/evening). The possibility of Saturday meetings was raised which may suit some Branch memberships.

Trustee Comments/Action Points

It is clear from the discussions under Item 7 on the Agenda that Branches are very varied with regards to attendance at meetings post-Covid and finances. The availability of exhibitions to attend to publicise the Society and raise funds has reduced which, together with reduced attendances, is affecting Branch finances in some cases. There are clear difficulties in attracting new Branch committee members. Financial help is available if required to keep a Branch 'afloat'. In spite of difficulties, the overall feeling was positive going forward. What can we learn from the successes?

(Note – good news - West Riding Branch now has new volunteers to take over as Secretary/Fixtures and Treasurer on the Branch committee – ILR)

8 Trustee Presentation

Great Western

Trustee representative David Bird gave an informative presentation on behalf of the Board of Trustees covering the following points:

Branch Attendance statistics – all Branches within the group have provided these;

Health & Safety (H&S) – essential that each Branch understands the Society's H&S Policy especially with regards to the meeting venue, including providing information on emergency evacuation at the start of meetings;

Branch web pages – all Branches present have up-to-date web pages – the Society's shop window. Help is available from the centre and on-going feedback is requested from Branches on how the Society might be able to improve its web presence;

Information about the relationship with the SLS was updated noting the good geographical synergy between the two societies. Concerns about possibly insufficient consultation were addressed and reassurances provided.

London & South

Trustee representative Reg Wood concentrated on Society finances and an expected deficit for the current financial year, largely due to the increase in postage costs for the printed *RO*. Unfortunately, there was no Members' Weekend in 2023 due to no volunteers to organise it. The one day Officers' Conference in Doncaster was, of necessity, a more expensive event. There have been three new Society publications over the last few months and Gift Aid is going well. The lease for Leatherhead is still to be signed by all parties at this time and payment of utilities is still to be resolved but the Business Rates have now been sorted with a substantial discount as a Registered Charity. The situation and processes for Bequests and Society insurance were outlined. The proposed closer working with the SLS was discussed including the potential benefits to both organisations. There was a query about having a Society credit card –something to look at in the future.

Midlands & North West

Trustee representative Irene Rabbitts raised concerns about late returns for Branch attendance statistics and Branch financial returns; all Branches were asked to get these in on time and to ask for help if this was likely to be an issue. Branch attendance figures should be sent in after every meeting becoming part of the regular post-meeting routine which, it is hoped, would be easier for Branches to manage. It was agreed that it would be helpful for Branches to share their meetings programmes with each other, other railway/transport societies, and any SLS Centres in their areas. Branches were asked to consider if their present meeting locations were still appropriate given where the membership lived. This discussion was aided by member location maps available at the meeting. These were given to the Branch representatives for sharing with their committees. Generally most Branches felt that the locations were appropriate. Other subjects appropriate for the Trustee briefing were covered in discussions elsewhere on the Agenda.

Northern Home Counties

Trustee representative David Goddard took the meeting through the points raised for discussion indicating that Society Chairman James Milne would like to see attendance statistics sent in immediately following Branch meetings. Also raised was the issue of the distance some members have to travel to meetings with increasing difficulties if using public transport. There was a reminder to submit Branch AGM minutes to the Branch Liaison Officer promptly, and Financial

returns to be sent to the new Assistant Treasurer Branches Chris Basford. An update on working more closely with the SLS was given. There was discussion re meeting venues and the geographical location of Branch members.

WREMNESSH

Trustee representative Richard Morris spoke of the need for more volunteers to become involved in digitising the Society's image collection. The meeting secretary (as an author of railway books) queried the cost of images intended publication as no details currently appear on the site. RM will investigate. There was an update on the discussions with the SLS with a possible first step being the RCTS taking on SLS membership administration, and the possibility of combining the *RO* and the *SLS Journal*. It might be difficult to merge the two libraries although any duplication could help save space. A reminder was given that Branches with limited financial resources can apply for central funding for a specific purpose and there was another reminder that six monthly financial returns must be submitted in a timely manner.

Trustee Comments/Action Points

[The query re costs of photographs will be looked into and report back to the meeting.](#)

9 Branch Activities

Great Western –Those present are generally good at keeping Branch pages on the website up to date. Younger members or younger attendees who are potential members could be approached to help with this thus enhancing a sense of belonging to the Society and greater awareness of the Society on to social media. There are many younger enthusiasts so there is a 'market to be tapped'.

All the Branches present have informal links with local preservation groups; these were shared and discussed.

Expenses for attending Regional Meetings – the process was noted and understood by all those present.

Risk Assessments (and other H&S requirements) – there was some uncertainty around the table as to what was required and guidance is being compiled to help with this. It is important for all Branch committees to be familiar with what is required.

Branch Indoor Meetings – there were no known significant issues in relation to any of the Branches present. Whilst the value of having a mid-meeting break for socialising was fully recognised, this has to be balanced where the venue is hired at an hourly rate, as is the importance of agreeing timings in advance with the speaker.

London & South

Unfortunately, there had been problems at the website training session at Doncaster last October because of unreliable WiFi. There should be talks about what is missing re the website. The Trustee representative would take these concerns back to the Board of Trustees (BoT). Some Branches already have good links with local heritage railways, others have more informal links. One Branch had three representatives attending and raised the question that expenses can only be covered for up to two delegates per Branch. It was for the meeting to discuss. Risk Assessments – the meeting felt that these are largely common sense. Laminated signage would be welcomed.

Midlands & North West

There were several comments about Branch web pages already showing much improvement but there is a need to update venue details and update meetings and activities programmes. Only official RCTS email addresses should be used rather than private ones. There are only informal links with other heritage railway societies. We should share programmes and meeting information with the SLS and vice versa and with other railway societies to work more closely together. How and what can be claimed by way of Regional Meeting expenses was explained. Branches have started doing Risk Assessments and the need to do so is beginning to be understood; Branches must be aware of emergency evacuation at their meeting venues. The value of having a mid meeting break for socialising and to give the presenter a break was recognised. Displaying RCTS signage to reinforce branding messages and so that visitors can be sure they are at the right venue for a meeting was agreed. It was agreed that speakers need a clear briefing on what is expected prior to giving a presentation and it would be useful to have feedback from other Branches on speakers worth inviting, value for money, level of expenses requested.

Northern Home Counties

The importance of the Branch's welcome message and homepage photographs to attract attention was agreed. There was discussion on how to build relationships with local railway organisations eg offering a discount for attending our meetings and possibly a discount on RCTS publications although it was felt that this last idea should be considered at Society rather than Branch level. The process for claiming expenses for this Regional meeting was well understood. Branches should be aware of individual venue requirements for emergency evacuation and, if possible, have emergency contact numbers. Risk Assessments were felt to be common sense. RCTS signage should be displayed at meetings and events. Laminated signs can be requested from the Branch Liaison Officer.

WREMNESSH

Trustee Richard Morris offered help to those Branches in the group who may need it to update their Branch web pages. Discussions on links with other heritage railway operations confirmed that these are informal and led on to discussion on the whereabouts of Society headboards. Reimbursement for attending Regional Meetings was well understood and uncontroversial. The meeting felt that a Risk Assessment template would be useful. One member objected to the use of 'moral responsibility' in relations to members' duties which appears in the H&S Policy – moral being considered subjective. There was discussion on having a free standing banner. Further discussion followed about time to socialise at Branch meetings, leading on to ensuring careful timings at meetings.

Trustee Comments/Action Points

It might be positive to build on currently informal links with heritage railways and similar. Laminated signage is available on request from the Branch Liaison Officer. A sample Risk Assessment form is now available as is Guidance. The Digital Officer has started consulting about updating the current website.

10 What do you want from the centre; what can you do in return?

Great Western

Personal contact between Branch Officers and Trustees/Society Officers is seen as very important in building relationships and facilitating interactions between Branches and the Centre. Mutual respect and a helpful attitude in both directions are vital as we are all volunteers and need to encourage one another in our roles. Having Trustee representatives at Regional Meetings is very helpful and Branches should likewise be encouraged to send representatives to national meetings.

London & South

Trustees attending Branch AGMs – this was stopped some years ago. Branches to invite a Trustee to their Branch AGM.

Midlands & North West

The Society is now run by a Board of Trustees mostly with specific roles. Channel any Branch issues through Irene Rabbitts (Branch Liaison Officer)

Northern Home Counties

This subject was not raised in the minutes – ILR

WREMNESSH

It was not clear what issues were behind this item. No issues raised by the WREMNESSH Branches.

[Trustee Comments/Action Points](#)

[This is about the two way relationship and engagement between Society volunteers at all levels.](#)

11 RCTS 100th Anniversary in 2028 – ideas for celebrating the occasion

Great Western

It is hoped that the centenary commemoration will be held in Cheltenham possibly involving representatives from the families of the founders. Significant anniversaries based in Cheltenham have been greatly enjoyed. As a near neighbour, Bristol Branch has offered assistance to Cheltenham Branch. All Branches in the group affirmed their support for the Society with any national initiatives. The possibility of a centenary rail tour was discussed possibly in collaboration with Pathfinder or Tyseley; there is potential for events at local preservation sites.

London & South

The Strategy Group (SG) are thinking of an event at Cheltenham. Ideas to be forwarded to the SG.

Midlands & North West

Ideas included: commemorative postage stamps issues by Royal Mail; 100 railway stations; 100 members' photographs; any 100 year old members; 1st 100 members; Loco 100; RCTS rail tour – utilising a steam loco built in 1928 if possible with photo stops/run pasts if the 'special' ventures onto a preserved railway. RO article on the state of the railways in 1928.

Northern Home Counties

A special train which could be run in conjunction with another group/groups; events happening for the Society in Cheltenham – the birthplace of the RCTS; a large block-booking on a rail-tour with someone like UK Rail Tours.

WREMNESSH

No suggestions forthcoming but believed that it is already proposed to have the 2028 Members' Weekend in Cheltenham. It would be useful to know what is within scope.

Trustee Comments/Action Points

Some good ideas to celebrate the RCTS 100th Anniversary. These will be passed to the Strategy Group.

12 Railway 200

Great Western

Network Rail are organising an exhibition train and would like the RCTS to be involved in its operation. Few details were available although Brian Arman has been approached as a potential speaker in connection with this tour. Transport for Wales (TfW) is proposing a series of events in connection with Railway 200 and a representative from TfW is due to speak at the next South Wales Branch meeting in July. (Post meeting – Dr Louise Moon of TfW spoke at the Branch Summer Social on 10 July 2024).

London & South

The Members' Weekend would take place in Darlington in 2024 to celebrate the S&D 200.

Midlands & North West

Briefing about the Network Rail train suggests the originally proposed 7 carriages is now likely to be reduced to 3. It is doubtful that there will be any benefit to the RCTS on current limited information.

Northern Home Counties

Involvement if possible, with the Network Rail exhibition train although Network Rail has yet to publish a plan for this train's operation.

WREMNESSH

There was interest from Branches but further details would be useful. It was asked whether Network Rail had approached other similar organisations.

Trustee Comments/Action Points

There is a lack of information from Railway 200 so it is fully understood that Branches are unable to commit to helping if sufficient detail and notice is provided. Any information forthcoming will be shared with the Branches and membership.

13 Confirmation of Chairman and Secretary for 2025 Regional Meetings

Great Western

Chairman: Brian Arman. Secretary: Paul Udey or Stewart Jolly. Both Bristol Branch.

London & South

Chairman: John Godfrey – Solent Branch. Secretary: to be taken on by Surrey Branch for 2025/6.

Midlands & North West

Chairman: Nigel Bowker – Merseyside, Cheshire & North Wales Branch. Secretary: Will Gibson – Furness, Lakes & Lune Branch.

Northern Home Counties

Chairman: Michael Smyth – Cambridge Branch. Secretary: David Elsdon – Hitchin & Welwyn Garden City Branch.

WREMNESSH

Chairman: Derek Stuckey – Sheffield Branch; Robin Gibbons – East Midlands Branch.

14 Any Other Business

Great Western

All present expressed their appreciation for the hospitality kindly provided by Terri and Brian.

London & South

JH is interested in any RCTS Rail Tour to the Blue Bell Railway behind Beachy head. The new document templates on the website should be used. The publications order form needs to be updated.

Midlands & North West

Door donations discussed – most around £3 for members, £4 for non-members. Brief discussion re pros & cons of afternoon meetings but no clear consensus was reached.

Northern Home Counties

Amend the form for photographs and books being left to the Society. Books are more difficult to handle and sell at Branch/Exhibition level. What can we use and sell eg DVDs and/or videos? In the Wills & Bequests, are members encouraged to leave items to the Society?

Trustee Comments/Action Points

Good hospitality and welcome are always valued. RCTS outside visits are of interest and opportunities are being developed by the Strategy Group. The Wills & Bequests leaflet has been updated and is available on the website. The Publications list has been updated.

15 Date, time and place of next meeting

Great Western - Saturday 14 June 2025, 12 noon, at 59 Kenmore Crescent, Filton park, Bristol

London & South - The equivalent date next year ie Saturday 21 June 2025, same time, same venue. Surrey Branch to organise.

Midlands & North West - Thursday 29 May 2025 at the Waverley Hotel, Crewe.

Northern Home Counties - TBC

Footnote to the Minutes from Michael Smyth – Cambridge Branch – *“Thank you for taking time to attend the Regional Meeting on 8th June. A particular thanks to Dave Elsdon for being Secretary and arranging a pleasant meal for us, and also to David Goddard for acting on behalf of the RCTS and his feedback on national matters. Perhaps the most important benefit from such a meeting is to make or renew contacts.”*

WREMNESSH - Venue agreed as the NRM again next year, date to be confirmed. NRM contact details passed to new RM secretary Robin Gibbons.

Trustee Comments/Action Points

My thanks as Branch Liaison Officer, to everyone who has taken part and made the Regional Meetings happen. It is a valuable way for all Society Officers to get together and exchange views as per the comment from Michael Smyth – see above. We can learn from each other and work together for the good of everyone.

2024 Regional Meetings Précis of the Summary Document

Please note this document does not detail the Trustee comments and/or National Action Points.

Introduction/Present/Apologies

Two groups had representatives from all Branches in the group; three groups were missing one Branch although only one of the missing Branches had given apologies. This is better than last year but it should still be noted that the groupings are being kept under review regarding viability; input from ALL Branches is welcomed even if not represented in person.

Minutes of the 2023 Regional Meetings

These were all accepted once some minor corrections had been made.

Matters Arising from local minutes not covered by the Agenda

Three groups had none; one had not yet implemented the exchange of Branch programmes within the group; the fifth raised banking issues, late arrival of the printed *RO*, welcome for the Quick Checklists in the Officers' Handbook.

2023 Regional Meeting Action Points

Noted by all groups.

Matters Arising from National Action Points

Three groups had none; one group discussed Branch attendance improvements/lack of improvement, membership distribution within a Branch area, RCTS advertising, how to get more people to visit the Library at Leatherhead; one group raised allocation of Branches and how this might be affected by closer relationships with the SLS, the ending of offering new Life Memberships requiring a Rule change.

Branch Presentations

Although all Branches are different there are some common themes emerging regarding attendance at meetings, Branch finances, uncertainty regarding meeting venues from some Branches with a need to seek alternatives, difficulty in attracting new committee members which threatens their existence as a Branch as well as the loss of some long term committee members over the past year. The good news is that steps taken to improve the situation are mostly now making a positive difference although the on-going issue of committee volunteers is still a serious concern. All Branches continue to offer an indoor meeting programme, some offer outside visits, and some are continuing to use Zoom to enhance their offering to members. All Branches are positive about their meetings programmes and financial stability, it is only the question of committee volunteers that is holding some back.

Trustee Presentation

Subjects covered included Branch Attendance statistics and submitting these regularly as part of the post-meeting routine; Health and Safety at meetings, visits and events; Branch web pages – the Society's 'shop window' and the importance of keeping these updated; the closer relationship with the SLS and exchanging meeting programmes with other railway/transport groups; Branch finances and financial and other returns; Branch meeting venue locations and suitability taking dispersal of the Branch membership into consideration, the photographic archive.

Branch Activities

Most Branches reported that they were generally good at keeping their webpages up to date and help was offered for those who needed it. It was hoped that doing this would attract new and younger members. Also raised was the requirement to use official RCTS email addresses for contacts rather than private email addresses. Most Branches had links with other railway and transport groups although these were informal, sometimes with reciprocal arrangements for advertising and reporting each others meetings. Greater cooperation with the SLS was broadly welcomed. Greater cooperation and links with others were a positive move. It was felt that more formal arrangements were the remit of the Society at national level.

There was discussion about time for socialising at meetings with the only potential issues being where venue hire was paid by the hour, and that timings for speakers should be clarified in advance to allow sufficient time to socialise. Risk Assessments were discussed and most Branches appeared to understand why these had been requested and what was required. Both a completed Sample Risk Assessment and guidance are now available. It was agreed that proper RCTS branded signage at meetings and events was desirable and useful both for members and visitors attending meetings. Most Branches are generally happy with the arrangements for reclaiming expenses for attending Regional Meetings although there was a query about reclaiming if more than two representatives attended where the additional person had a formal role ie chairman/secretary.

What do you want from the 'centre; what can you do in return

Personal contact between Branch Officers and Trustee/national Society Officers was seen as very important in building relationships and facilitating interactions in both directions helped by mutual respect and a helpful attitude at all levels. We are all volunteers and need to encourage one another. Having Trustee representatives at Regional Meetings was welcomed and Branch representatives should be encouraged to attend national meetings too. All Branches should be encouraged to invite a Trustee to their Branch AGMs and there was a reminder that any Branch can contact the Branch Liaison Officer if they have an issue.

RCTS 100th Anniversary in 2028 – ideas for celebrating the occasion

A number of suggestions were raised with some common themes coming out of discussions – ie holding an event (the Members' Weekend) in Cheltenham possibly involving representatives from the families of the Founders. Bristol Branch has offered to help Cheltenham Branch with any local arrangements. A centenary Railtour was suggested possibly in collaboration with a commercial operation (Tyseley, Pathfinder, UK Rail Tours were mentioned) possibly a large block-booking; utilising a steam loco built in 1928 if possible with photo stops/runs past. Further ideas to be forwarded to the Strategy Group that is already looking at possibilities. Other suggestions included: events at local preservation sites; Royal Mail postage stamps (a request for this has already been made); 100 railway stations; 100 members' photographs; any 100 year old members; first 100 members; Loco 100; an RO article on the state of the railways in 1928.

Railway 200

Most groups were interested in Railway 200 but felt that there was too little information available so far to make any definite commitment. Transport for Wales (TfW) appears to have been more proactive than some. The 2025 Members' Weekend is to take place in Darlington to celebrate the S&D 200. Further information would be welcomed by all Branches.

Confirmation of Chairman and Secretary for 2025 Regional Meetings

Arrangements were agreed for each Regional Meeting group.

Any Other Business

Thanks for hosting the meetings were given. Other items raised: rail tours of particular interest; new document templates on the website should be used; requested door donations; pros and cons of afternoon meetings; updating the publications order form whenever there is a change; the logistics of book and DVD sales; encouraging members to leave items to the Society in the Wills & Bequests leaflet.

Date, time and place of next meeting

All Regional groups either set the specific date, time and venue or the approximate details for 2025 to be confirmed in due course. There were thanks for making the arrangements for 2024 with a particular footnote that 'the most important benefit from such a meeting is to make or renew contacts'.

[My personal thanks as Branch Liaison Officer to everyone who has taken part and made the meetings happen – a valuable way for Society Officers to get together and exchange views. We can learn from each other and work together for the good of everyone.](#)

Appendix 3



A Charitable Incorporated Organisation registered with the Charity Commission Registered Number 1169995

EMERGENCY EVACUATION CHECKLIST

Branch:

Venue:

- Direct attendees to the Fire Exits and remind them to proceed to the Meeting Point (the grass area the St Pancras side of the building).
- Ask everyone to assemble and not leave until after the roll call has been taken.
- Ensure Signing-In Sheets are secured and removed from the building.
- If not already done, ensure the emergency services are contacted by dialling 999.
- Using the Signing-In Sheets, conduct a roll call. If safe to do so, organise a search for any missing persons; if not, advise the emergency services upon their arrival.
- Remind all attendees that they must NOT attempt to re-enter the building until the emergency services advise that it is safe to do so.

FIRE EXTINGUISHERS:

<u>Location</u>	<u>Type</u>

Only attempt to tackle a fire if it is safe to do so