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NEWSLETTER No 1

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Gentlemen,

In the few days since "penning" my introductory newsletter matters have moved on with some pace. I have received minutes from this years Regional meetings and Hertfordshire Branch's 2001 Meetings Programme. Branch Secretary's please find your copy of the fixtures enclosed. (There may be others that will accompany this once we are at Doncaster.)

RAILWAY OBSERVER

Page 518 in the November 2000 RO has a blank area at the bottom right of the page. The page, without the photograph, is being reprinted on a single A5 (RO Size) sheet which will be enclosed with your December RO. Members can then either cut and glue or otherwise attach the page to the damaged area.

SOCIETY TREASURER

After a lengthy search Tony Skinner from our North East Branch has offered to take on this role from Acting Treasurer, John Redgate. More details will emerge about the change at Doncaster this weekend.

REGIONAL MEETINGS

Following receipt of the minutes of four Regional Meetings held earlier this year I am able to summarise these below. As could be anticipated there are *some* common areas of concern as well as individual issues. Seventeen branches were involved, with the meetings being held in **Kent** (South East/Sussex/South of England/South Essex), **Reading** (West of England/Cheltenham/Surrey/Bristol/), **Darlington** (West Riding/Humberside/East Midlands/North East) and **Digswell** (Peterborough/Ipswich/Hertfordshire/Northampton/Milton Keynes).

Where there is an active response to some of the points raised these are include in the summary, otherwise the matter will be raised at a future MC meeting with relevant answers to follow.

COMMUNICATION

This important subject was highlighted at all the meetings with an emphasis being made on the lack of newsletters and information from the MC to branches.

Response: As should by now be clearly evident communication has become a high priority matter that the MC is addressing with some urgency. You are now experiencing what is hoped will be the way of the future with regular newsletters.

Following Doncaster the MC have a meeting in London on 7th December, These, and other matters will be discussed and where appropriate reports will be made to Branches.

WEB SITE AND INTERNET

David Kelso reported on the developments that had taken place with a considerable amount of updated information installed on the web site. The general consensus of opinion is of the site being a success. Some branches already had an Internet Officer but felt that more direction could be forthcoming about the intricacies that are involved. A strong opinion was that there should be an IT page in the RO to act as a guide to users.

Response: The Society is actively engaged with the formation of an Internet Committee that would oversee the operation of the web site and also address the Information Technology issues associated with it. Reports will be forthcoming once the group meets. It can be reported that by early September twenty new members had been recruited via the Web Site whilst at the time of writing the Site had been visited 3536 times.

SUBSCRIPTIONS BY DIRECT DEBIT

Branches have put this issue forward for important discussion with the view that this method could help in stemming the tide of non-renewals as well as streamlining and consolidating the renewal process in general.

Response: This matter will be open for further discussion once our new Treasurer, Tony Skinner, is elected. The MC is fully aware of member's views and has had to wait until the Treasurer's post has been filled before progressing the issue. Branches will be kept informed of developments.

BRANCH BOUNDARIES

It seems that lengthy discussion took place about boundaries as they presently are. A number of instances were cited of members living close to boundaries that cause an overlap of branches. Indeed several members attend meetings at a branch other than that allocated using the postcode method. In the absence of a suitable alternative it was however agreed that the postcode method seemed to be working. Where a member lives close to more than one branch there should be an option given to the member to decide which branch he/she wished to be allocated to. It was suggested at this stage that the Society keep this matter under review. Discussion also included thoughts about where any new branches could be formed dependent on the geographic location of members, either not attached to a branch, or living centrally between more than one branch. Doncaster, Salisbury, Manchester, South Wales and Hitchin were places that were put forward as possible venues.

Response: This will be put on the agenda for discussion at a future MC meeting. It should be noted that the newly formed Milton Keynes Branch has been a success and the plans are moving forward to set up a branch at Croydon as part of the Surrey set up.

THE RAILWAY OBSERVER AND SOCIETY PUBLICATIONS

Whilst it was generally thought that improvements to the RO were welcomed some areas needed further discussion. It was felt that "noticeboard" should precede Branch News whilst a view was expressed that the RO had never had a regular editorial. There was also criticism of the lack of column dividers and the starting point of a subject. Also commented on was that photographs did not necessarily appear in relation to the text. It was noted from discussions that the Society was looking for suitable Editors for books. In some quarters it was felt that smaller style publications with local themes would sell better than some of the "series" style books. It was however recognised, that the Society retains the position of continuing to produce high quality specialist works, especially our definitive Locomotive History publications.

Response: These issues need to be discussed within the MC and will be reported on once the Managing Editor, David Bird, Publications Officer, Reg Wood have had the opportunity to respond.

EXHIBITIONS/SALES/MARKETING/PUBLICITY

Branches involved generally attended exhibitions, open days and rail/transport related events. The importance of our title being prominently displayed was stressed, as was the image of personnel manning the stands and coming face to face with potential customers and new members. Some concern was expressed about the availability of Sales Stands for those branches who did not possess one. There was a genuine call for the image of the Society to be updated. There is a need to update the Information Packs given to prospective new members and to make available a more comprehensive list of merchandise available to and through the Society.

Response: New Posters and Membership Packs will be available here at Doncaster for every Branch to take away and distribute and display. Branches should by now have received or been advised how to obtain the new headboards. These can be conveniently displayed on sales stands and also at meetings. Other points need to be discussed by the MC and will be responded too accordingly.

OTHER BUSINESS

Other matters that were discussed generally, were; **Speakers**, one group has decided to produce an area register of speakers giving details of subjects, fees/expenses, distance travelled and contact details. The forthcoming Society's 75th Anniversary in 2003 was opened up for discussion. It is felt that the Society should mark this celebration with something memorable such as a Railtour. Suggestions regarding **Branch Stock's** of Society Publications was raised with out of print books being recalled in order to satisfy postal customers and to centralise the remaining supplies.