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1. INTRODUCTION

There are a number of important issues raised in this Newsletter that should be noted and/or actioned, these are; {a} Contrary to opinion there will be at Officers' Conference at Cheltenham on Sunday 26th October, albeit a shortened event; {b} Officers' Conference Agenda items; {c} Members' Weekend Booking Forms; {d} Statement from Tony Skinnars on Society Financial Matters; {e} Publications Report; and {f} Branch AGM Reports.

We extend a warm welcome to David Pick who has taken over the secretarial reins at Northampton and extend thanks to Tony Hill for his past work for the branch and wish Tony well for the future.

2. 75th ANNIVERSARY JOINT RAILTOURS

There are still seats available on both of the Railtours arranged jointly with pathfinders Tours. "The Heart of Wales Observer" will run on Saturday 20th September 2003 whilst the "The Alton Observer" will run on Saturday 11th October. Booking forms are both on the Society Website and in recent Railway Observer's.

IMPORTANT NOTE

"The Alton Observer" - participants may join this train at VICTORIA where the train enjoys a loco change prior to it's run to the Mid Hants. However IT MUST BE NOTED THAT SETDOWN OF THE RETURN JOURNEY WILL BE AT BEDFORD. There are no intermediate stops booked on the "southern".

3. 75th ANNIVERSARY MEMBERS' WEEKEND - CHELTENHAM 2003

3.1 EVENTS

Plans are well advanced for this years' Members' Weekend (24th to 26th October) and the booking form for the weekend should be on the Society Website within the next

week or so with the RO edition appearing in the September publication. Early booking would be appreciated as this assists Cheltenham Branch in getting information fed back to the various event centres. Friday evenings' presentation at The Carlton Hotel will be by Julian Stanley who runs Lineside Video Productions featuring a high quality programme of trains at home and in Europe. On Saturday 25th we will leave by coach for Kidderminster for a day on the Severn Valley Railway where participants are free to "do your own thing" before returning for Dinner at The Carlton on Saturday evening. Details of our guests for the evening will be announced in the near future.

On Sunday a coach will transport members to Cheltenham Racecourse Station for a day on the Gloucestershire & Warwickshire Railway. It is anticipated one coach will leave after breakfast and a further coach following the Officers' Conference. Lunch on Sunday can be taken at Toddington on the G & W R.

3.2 NAME BADGES

At this year's event it is intended to supply everyone present, including guests and family members with a Society Name Badge [to be handed back after the event in the case of non-Society/Branch officials] to display both first and second names. Would you please advise all members in your branch that when they book their full used names should be placed on the booking form in order that Gordon Davies can prepare badges ready for the Friday of the weekend. (e.g. if you are named William and use Bill as your name please put Bill if you prefer etc; etc;)

4. OFFICERS' CONFERENCE SUNDAY 26TH OCTOBER

As stated in the introduction there *will* be an Officers' Conference at Cheltenham, at present the format is still under discussion as we are awaiting some detail information from The Carlton Hotel. Options are for an early start (possibly 08.00 - 08.30) with a Buffet Breakfast available for delegates in the Conference Room or an 09.00 start after breakfast. Both having a two-hour time limit put on them. This will then allow delegates attending the OC to join the visit to the G & W Railway. To aide this Officers Reports will be in written format (much the same as for the AGM but not appearing in the RO). These will be mailed to delegates after the 12th October with the OC Agenda.

Advance notice of items for the OC Agenda is appended below, some are raised following the Regional Meetings and some by the MC. Branches wishing to make responses or comments known prior to the OC may do so in writing to John Day by 12th October). Also it is advised that prior notice of any item to appear under AOB must be made to the Chairman before the meeting.

4.1 ADVANCE NOTICE OF AGENDA ITEMS FOR THE OC

4.1.1 OFFICERS' CONFERENCE: WHEN?

Regional groups have decided that October is the preferred month for the OC - discussion is invited as to whether to hold this during the "first two weeks of October" - thus avoiding where possible half-term conflict or later in the month as in more recent years. (Please note that in recent years prices generally quoted are the same for whichever period we might opt for).

4.1.2 SUBSCRIPTIONS:

To discuss options for a differential subscription rate in an attempt to attract younger members to the Society to join at a reduced subscription until they attain a certain age limit.

To discuss whether to introduce a bracketed subscription for say periods of 3 or 5 years at the subscription rate in being at the time of subscribing

To discuss whether to amend the Life Membership options to allow Life Membership at an earlier age or at any time during a period of Membership?

4.1.3 REGIONAL MEETINGS

A suggestion is put by the MC to canvas thoughts about reconstituting the Regional Meetings Groups from Five to Four, if any group or branch has any direct views on this the item is to appear on the Officers' Conference Agenda.

4.1.4 SOCIETY QUESTIONNAIRE

This subject has once again been raised. Branches are asked to come back to the OC with a decision as to whether a questionnaire is required, what information is sought by having a questionnaire and how many volunteers are prepared to work on it to achieve any perceived objectives by having a questionnaire?

5. 75th ANNIVERSARY PUBLICATION

We are pleased to announce that a 13th RO will be published at some point later this year that will depict the history and activities of the Society during the last 75 years.

Further announcements will be made in the near future

6. REGIONAL MEETINGS

With all the Regional Meetings having taken place during May and June a Summary of Action Points has been prepared and was discussed at the Management Committee meeting on 9th August. Through this Newsletter some of the points raised at RM's may well be answered. If this is the case then the summary, when sent to Regional Group Chair's by Gordon Davies will either confirm or elaborate on the issue. Some matters have been referred to the Officers' Conference in which case please see relevant item under the Officers' Conference heading in this Newsletter

7. BRANCH MATTERS

7.1 DISTRIBUTION OF BRANCH FIXTURE LISTS

A question has been raised regarding the need to supply a minimum of 27 (30 preferred) of your Branch fixtures. In simple terms this allows for every Branch to have a comprehensive collection of every Branches programme. It would be expected that these could be presented in a folder and made available for anyone to view at Branch Meetings, exhibitions or any function that a branch might be attending. It should also be remembered that a copy should be sent to Ronnie McAdam (for the Popular Railway Press), to John Richards (for the RO) and David Kelso (for the Society Web Site). A reminder to branches that if these are sent Electronically (preferably on a single sided sheet as opposed to fixture cards) then I am prepared to print the relevant number of distribution copies.

Thanks to those branches that have already sent their fixtures to me, copies for all branches are circulated accordingly.

7.2 BRANCH AGM REPORTS

Submission of Branch AGM Reports has, in recent years, not been paid much attention too. Whilst some branches do rigidly sent their signed AGM reports to the Branch Liaison Secretary unfortunately some do not. It is therefore requested that duly signed copies be forwarded upon completion of a Branch AGM. These will then be analysed and subsequently passed to the Library for binding and inclusion in the Society Archive.

If you have recent copies that you have not forwarded it would be appreciated if this could be done so at the earliest possible time.

Regional Meeting minutes and reports are to be similarly archived at the Library as these are currently forthcoming.

8. PUBLICATIONS

8.1 NEWS

A number of Publication issues were raised at the Regional Meetings and present circumstances have somewhat overtaken matters. Geoff Bayliss has recently been seriously ill and whilst recovering may have difficulty in the future continuing his task within the publications set-up. *(Also see Tony Skinner reports on page 6)* - another mainstay within the organisation, Norman Claydon, has decided to retire after over 40 years of loyal hard working service. Taking these matters into account and the ensuing review of the Publication set-up that was already being planned we ask branches and members to be patient whilst all these tasks are reviewed by the Management Committee.

8.2 SUPPLY SOURCES

In the meantime we do have an appeal for some urgent information regarding branch new publication sources. If this can be fed back to John Day in order that a report can be made to the MC and Publications Committee. This information will help greatly as we review the publications and distribution process.

We are aware that some branches have a "collective" whereby pubs are collected from source and distributed within smaller groups. What is required is notification of where you, as an individual branch, source your publication supplies?

For More Publications News See TONY SKINNER REPORTS BELOW(Page 6)

9. SOCIETY PRODUCTS

During the last year or so we have supplied to Branches a number of items, Bookmarks, Pens, Stickers, Lapel Badges. We are looking for feedback as to how these stocks have fared. Would branch sales officers please put the details in a memo and send to John Day for collation and subsequent reporting back to the MC. It is important that we receive feedback in order to assess the demand for each product, as this will help our future marketing strategy and allow us to order or reorder products according to demand.

10. TONY SKINNER REPORTS

Tony was able to attend three of the Regional Meetings where he was able to inform those Groups of the current proposals being dealt with by the MC. In order to give the groups he was unable to visit an understanding of the information available Tony has also spent countless hours computerising the Society Finances for which we should all be grateful as this is allowing comprehensive reports such as this. Tony reports below. Thank you Tony(JD).

BANKING ARRANGEMENTS

(Based on a presentation to the MC in June 2003)

Background

In April 2001 responsibility for our Lloyds TSB banking arrangements was transferred from the branch at Wallington to a business centre in Guildford. Because this happened just as the post of Society Treasurer was being handed over; it was some considerable time before its significance became apparent to us. We now know that this was a cost cutting exercise by the bank that the change was under-resourced and the particular needs of an organisation such as ours were neither recognised nor sought.

In isolation none of the individual problems this caused was insurmountable. The killer was the difficulty in communicating with Guildford. You have to go through a central switchboard and the staff there often can not put you through.

The final item in this part of the jigsaw is direct debit. It became obvious that whatever discussion I needed to have to either achieve or rule out direct debit, could not be done by phone with Guildford. I reported to the Officers' Conference last October that no progress could be made on direct debit without sorting out our banking arrangements first. We left things as they were for the 2003 renewal season.

Proposal

My preferred way forward was to relocate the bank accounts to Newcastle and the MC has accepted this.

From discussions with a business manager at the Newcastle business centre it is clear that it is possible to stay with Lloyds TSB with a better service through my being able to meet with a business manager to resolve any difficulties and discuss the banking arrangements. Their normal focus is on business profitability but we have been able to establish understanding that in our case focus is on retention of members through the renewal process. This leads us into direct debit et al.

DIRECT DEBIT

From my discussions so far it is clear that the bank is going through a risk averse phase, and that includes aversion to giving an organisation like ours a direct debit facility.

The canvas of members about direct debit produced YES 684 - NO 550. This marginal enthusiasm has added weight to the priority of stabilising our banking arrangements first; it does not rule out looking elsewhere in due course if necessary.

DISPOSAL OF SURPLUS PUBLICATIONS' STOCK

The Publications Committee has further decided:

Western Change

Action the proposal to let branches have up to two boxes free as long as they would collect. Branches free to dispose of the books in whatever way they saw fit. Branches could write off any stock, which they are currently holding and treat them in the same way. This offer to branches available until April 2004 AGM after which the pubs committee would decide what to do with any remaining stock.

Robin Hood Line

Give remaining stock away to branches at the end of October.

Raising Steam on the LMS

Agreed to reduce price to £15.95 to take effect from 1st November.

RETIREMENT OF NORMAN CLAYDON

OCTOBER 2003 BRANCH RETURNS AND SUBSEQUENT ARRANGEMENTS

Norman is retiring after over 40 years in post.

He will be seeing out the current financial year. It would be greatly appreciated if all branches could submit their end of October publications returns before the end of November so that Norman can close his books neatly and proceed to an almost unprecedented well earned rest.

There will be new arrangements including banking. To be advised later.

11. LIBRARY

11.1 LIBRARY - SALES AND LOAN BOX REQUESTS

Increasing numbers of branches are using the Library's surplus books and magazine stocks for exhibitions and sales/sales. It is not practical to handle more than one group of people collecting sales stock at the same time. It is therefore ESSENTIAL that any branch wishing to collect sales stock or EXCHANGE A LOANS BOX MUST agree a day for this in advance. It is usually possible to do this in the two-hour period BEFORE the official opening times. At present there are already two bookings for August and one for September.

11.2 TERRY SILCOCK NON-AVAILABILITY

Please be advised that Terry will not be available during the whole of November so will be unable to provide any exchange of boxes or supply/receive sales stock during that month.

11.3 CHANGE OF ISP PROVIDER & CONTACT INFORMATION

For Email contact please use only the LIBRARIAN@RCTS.ORG.UK address and not the Compuserve address.

Other details are:

Phone 02088 663432 and Fax/Voice Mail 08701 318711(national call rate).

12. SURPLUS SOCIETY EQUIPMENT

Alan Cooke has surplus to requirement a PRIMAX COLORADO DIRECT 9600 Flatbed Scanner [a simple flatbed scanner that does a reasonable job on text & photos. If any Branch would like to relieve Alan of this would they please contact Alan Cooke (first come - first served!)? Alan is prepared to take this to Cheltenham for collection at the Members' Weekend otherwise arrangements must be made to collect the scanner from Alan.

13. BRANCH LIAISON SECRETARY

Please note that I will not be contactable from 5th September until 12th October 2003. If you do call and leave a message please support this with the date you call. It would also be preferred, in case the tape fills up (it hasn't yet), that you support your message in writing or by Email. On my return my priority will be to circulate the Officers Conference Agenda in order that these are in your hands by Friday 17th October at the latest. Your co-operation in ensuring that any OC related items are sent in order that I can action them immediately upon my return. Thanks.

John Day, Ipswich, 10th August 2003 (Newsletter12)