

OFFICERS' NEWSLETTER 89

BRANCH LIAISON SECRETARY

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REGIONAL MEETINGS SUMMARY

Included with this mailing is the summary of the 2015 round of Regional Meetings. All the minutes have been put into a spreadsheet format so a comparison can be made between the groupings when dealing with the agenda items.

Previously I have been using an Excel spreadsheet but some recipients have commented that they are unable deal with these. So I have converted it to a .pdf format to see anybody finds this easier. Please let me have your feedback.

The Regional Meetings for 2015 are included on the agenda for this year's Officers' Conference so please take a look and be prepared to add to the discussion.

A REMINDER

So far 19 branches have not responded to my invite to the OC included with Newsletter 88. If you are one of those can please get in touch ASAP.

So far we have 146 new recruits this year – compared with 106 in 2014

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

12th October 2015

	EMNESH	LANCS & NORTH WEST	GREAT WESTERN	LONDON & SOUTH	NORTHERN HOME COUNTIES	NORTH WEST & MIDLAND	MC COMMENTS
PREVIOUS ACTION POINTS and OTHER TOPICS							
RAILWAY OBSERVER	All agreed the content and the range of illustrations are very good.						
REDUCED MEMBERSHIP FOR LONG STANDING MEMBER	Responding to a query on reduced subscriptions for long-standing members, Reg advised that this could not apply, especially when direct-debit subscriptions were established; in the latter case, neither would the 3-year discount apply. He confirmed that banks were willing to operate a direct-debit subscription system.						
MAKE UP OF THE REGIONAL GROUPINGS				Steve Ollive queried a proposed change to branch groupings. Gordon reported that the MC had agreed there should not be any changes			Change in groupings will only take place at branch requests.
RECRUITMENT AND MEMBERSHIP	On recruitment and membership, Reg reported that 79 new members had joined via the digital procedure. The ensuing discussion concluded that recruitment at exhibition sales stands was not practicable - other than the distribution of Society information.						Recruitment is continuing upwards and the result of the 2015 campaign will be given at the OC at Cheltenham.
NAMEPLATES HELD BY THE SOCIETY	It was noted that Nameplate displays had been setup on the Bluebell, Seven Valley, and Isle of Wight Railways. Relating to the Sheffield Branch plates, ownership is no longer a problem; these are to be mounted for display at the Sheffield Victoria Hotel in the near future.						No date yet for the unveiling of the plates at Sheffield.
PAYMENT BY CREDIT & DEBIT CARD,			Usage by branches was low and the facility was withdrawn but it is still available at national events.				

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SOCIETY PUBLICATIONS	Regarding Society publications, it was commented that maybe completion of the L.M.S. Series is continuing. However given the reduced availability of authors, Volume 2 of the Black Fives will be ready by the MW/OC. The next book will be 'The LMS Pacifics' by John Jennison, followed by the Patriots.						LMS Class 5 Vol 2 has been printed and is with our book distributor at Nottingham.
NEW SOCIETY ARCHIVE	Regarding the Library service, Reg advised that the possibility of using accommodation at Leatherhead was under investigation. Humberside raised the question of whether or not this service should be continued, in view of the quite small number of members using it.						The new premises should be regarded as 'The Archive/Library'. The society has books, photographs and many other items in storage at various locations and these need to be brought together in a central location.

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BRANCH PRESENTATIONS							
	Sheffield Branch: Alan Lovecy advised that their finances were currently satisfactory; they have arranged 3 afternoon meetings per season (to suit 'elderly' members) but have reverted to 2 after reviewing attendances. An ageing membership poses problems with 'succession' for Branch officers.	Furness, Lakes and Lune Had a varied programme of fixtures, held in good premises. There was a wide range of skills in communication available for the smooth running of this Branch. On the debit side, there is a poor attendance base for our meetings with an ageing group of members in common with most if not all other Branches. Getting speakers can sometimes take some organising to attract younger people to meetings. The main threat to the Branch is one of possible declining interest in our hobby, though this may be outside the scope of our immediate concerns.	Bristol reported an average attendance of 47 at meetings and the new member offer had been pushed resulting in eight new members this year. Support for observation days was poor except for Westbury where strawberries and cream were on offer. The dinner at Midford was also well supported helped by the Pimms reception on the viaduct before the meal.	Croydon had well-attended meetings, a varied programme and sales were good. The branch needed a dedicated publicity officer and sales were dependent on one person.	Cambridge, Jim Crane reported an unwillingness of members to assist the committee & only seemed likely to help in a very adverse situation. They had a very successful outdoor evening meeting at a local garden railway, but usually the attendance is varied depending upon the subject & speaker, attendance has crept up to about 30 members.		

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	West Riding Branch: Bob Green noted that they also hold 2 afternoon meetings per season, plus 8 evening meetings and a separate AGM; average attendance is approx. 29. They try to arrange mid-session refreshments whenever possible. Malcolm Riley has re-joined the Society and arranges outdoor visits. It was also noted that the Branch experiences competition with other local Societies, and it is important to avoid clashes with their speakers, and if possible, improve on their programmes! It was difficult to decide where to advertise RCTS meetings, given the number of populated centres. Member contact is achieved through e-mails, via a monthly newsletter.	Merseyside, Chester and North Wales Branch. The main accomplishment for the past year was that of avoiding closure, after the deaths of long-serving committee members. However, such sad losses and further setbacks were countered by a determined push to find committee replacements at such short notice and this was successful, thus ensuring the continued running of the Branch. Attendance at meetings has actually slightly improved, mainly as a result of an increase in non-member attenders. Financial stability was maintained throughout this difficult year. In addition to indoors meetings, several outdoor fixtures were held and enjoyed. On the debit side, the branch did not attend the Merseyside Model Railway event. In the next year of meetings, there will be three afternoon meetings held, which it is hoped will be attractive to members who do not attend traditional evening meetings, in addition to familiar faces. This may even result in recruiting new	South Wales reported attendance of 40+ at meetings made up of 50/50 members and visitors. The new members offer had brought in six new members. The committee had successfully recruited new blood enabling existing members to step down. The branch has a Yahoo Group and a Facebook page to advertise branch meetings.	Solent's notable achievements have been attendance at the Eastleigh Model Railway Exhibition and the visit to Arlington Railway Works. A failure was not to get a speaker from Arlington until just before the previous month's meeting. A threat, common to all branches, is the lack of members willing to join the Committee.	Hitchin, Dave Elsdon reported that the Branch has had an increase in numbers attending meetings but the afternoon meetings in Welwyn Garden City are proving more popular. We only have one outdoor meeting a year for which numbers attending remain poor considering the membership we have. The Branch attends on average eight exhibitions a year including three on behalf of the Society, these are at Peterborough, Alexandra Palace & Warley. The Branch is also financially sound.		

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	North East Branch: Tony Skinner noted that the Branch had experienced 'personnel' problems in recent times, and it has taken over 2 years for the committee to 'stabilise'. Sales activities at various exhibitions were going well – 14 attendances being noted for the past year. There had been some complication in resolving the relevant finances for the Newcastle and Darlington sections, but this is now complete. The AGM will include internal business, combined with a local speaker. The programme plan for 2015-16 is well advanced. Jim Sedgwick wishes to step down from his secretarial office at the end of the 2015-16 season, thus presenting another succession problem.	West Midlands Branch - Felt they have a fine committee who all pull together. There had been good attendances at the Coventry meetings, while Birmingham had modest attendances. Importantly, the Branch were solvent. There had been only limited outside visits during the year. The Branch is not now involved in the Warley Model Event, which it was felt had become rather impersonal in organisation. On a positive note, it was hoped that other events could then be supported by the manpower released by such a decision.	Cheltenham reported attendance of 25/30 at meetings but the committee is now down to three members.	South East had successful meetings and organised an annual coach trip. Finding a replacement on the committee for David Kelso had been a challenge and sales were dependent on one person. Attendance at the new Faversham exhibition was an opportunity.	, Bev Steele told the meeting that the Branch had a good year with their nine evening meetings proving more popular than the three afternoon ones. They still attend 8 or 9 exhibitions / fairs a year & have a large selection of second hand books. The Branch has appointed a new treasurer recently, whilst member John Day is still very much a driving force for the Branch & Society		
	Humberside Branch: John Foreman reported that the Branch programme for the first half of the 2015-16 season is established, and finances are sufficient to meet speaker and venue expenses. Our small committee continues to function, but there is the problem of identifying successors. Due to the ageing and some disability of the relevant volunteers, the Branch no longer attends exhibition-sales; there is the related issue of stand cost, particularly at York and Doncaster, which detracted from profitability. Indoor meeting attendances range between 12 and 20, the maximum being 35. Two afternoon meetings are held (Dec., Jan.), and two informal outdoor gatherings at Barnetby take place (June/July).	Lancashire and North Western Branch. - On the positive side, there has been an improvement in cutting costs, continuing the trend started the previous year when the move to new, cheaper premises helped cut costs. Several outside visits were made during the year. These were well attended, with the welcome bonus of money being raised for charity from these outside visits. Not all outside visiting plans were successful. A visit to the Newcastle Metro system depot had been mooted, but this was cancelled because of lack of numbers. It had been hoped that the move to new premises might lead to greater meeting attendances, or even attracting new membership, but this may be an opportunity for the immediate future.	Thames Valley reported that after 50 years they were moving out of Oxford and in future will be meeting in the Didcot Civic Centre. Branch meetings were advertised on the local Oxford TV channel 8 and a successful quiz evening with Reading Railway society was held. The branch has also organised a number of signal box visits at various locations as well as a visit to the now closed Reading TMD.	Surrey's average attendance at meetings was a healthy 51. Book sales had halved in the year ending April 2015 compared to the previous year but the branch still made a surplus. Collaboration with Windsor & Maidenhead was mutually beneficial. The committee had been reorganised and Andy and Irene's work in organising the members weekend had been a substantial achievement.	Milton Keynes Bob Ballard reported that the Branch was doing well having introduced a winter break (no meetings in January & February) & carrying on from March to December. Meeting attendance has increased by about 10% this year with meeting numbers now averaging in the mid twenties. Joint meetings are also held with Northampton, both exhibitions & outings are reasonably successful & well attended		

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	Scottish Branch: Richard Thorburn noted that consideration is being given to combining their meetings with The Scottish Railway Preservation Society – to reduce costs – as they use the same venue; projector hire costs could also be shared. They have recruited 3 new members recently. Ken Falconer wishes to 'retire' from their committee in the near future.			Windsor & Maidenhead had increased their membership and average attendance was 28. Joint meetings with Marlow Railway Society worked well. The branch had given up two of the three exhibitions attended, due to losses. 60% of the committee were National officers. An open day at a local community centre was an opportunity.	Peterborough This remains one of the smaller Branches averaging 15 members per meeting despite losing five active members in the past year including the noted author Robert Townsin, reported Robert Warburton. Numbers are often made up with members from another local railway group joining their meetings. The branch has a new Chairman & now is better organised. The branch is financially viable despite limited funds.		
	East Midlands Branch: Rodney Allen reported that their finances are satisfactory, and that average meeting attendance is about 35. Afternoon meetings were proving popular; there is local 'competition' from other societies. The projection facility is being improved, but digital projection is not yet established – others' problems being noted. Sales activity is expanding, and there is benefit from selling second-hand collections. The format of the AGM starts with the formal business, followed by a local speaker. There is a succession problem with the position of Chairman.			The committee at South Essex had been struggling but vacancies had now been filled. Attendances had increased to an average of 40 plus, with over 70 for Chris Green. The members didn't seem interested in any branch activities other than meetings.	Northampton The Branch has recently purchased a new digital projector supported by a laptop. Attendances are good averaging between 30 & 50 members per meeting with afternoon meetings attracting more than evening ones, the Branch also moves meetings between Wellingborough & Roade ensuring coverage of the whole region. The Branch is also very active in arranging outdoor meetings & is trying to develop more of a club feel to its activities, but is still finding it difficult to convert visitors into members.		

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					Watford. Geoff Plumb reported that the Branch had moved to a new venue nearer the station but with limited parking, these factors did cause a slight drop in attendances but they have since recovered. The Branch also holds a get-together in the form a meal prior to some meetings at a nearby hostelry. Our Branch secretary very recently resigned but the Chairman does have someone in mind to take on the job, also Watford have signed Chris Green a new high profile member who will hopefully add to the profile the Branch is trying to project.		The MC as always thanks all branch officers for their continuing efforts in maintaining and enhancing their branches.

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NEW TOPICS							
IS COMMUNICATION STILL A PROBLEM	The problem of insufficient time for Branches to prepare comments on this (after issue of the Agenda) was identified. However it was felt important to continue the exchange of views through annual Group Meetings and via the Officers' Conference. Also, the need to hold more frequent Branch Committee meetings was recognised as a means of preparing comments and ideas in general.	One factor that was soon mentioned was the use of e-mail in communicating within the society, making it considerably easier for quick and effective communication by Branches, (a) to the Management Committee and (b) to other Branches. It was suggested that the Society website could be used for occasional reports or newsletters from Management level to various levels of the society's branches, especially if rapid response is needed. Mike Robinson remarked that he has had this idea in mind himself. One interesting suggestion was that those who attend meetings as non-members could participate locally in generating e-mails as part of the process of e-mailing being used for conveying ideas and comments to the Management Committee. Mike Robinson commented that he was in favour of an e-mail prompting approach, adding that such an approach could have considerably reduced the relative waste of time which printing of the DG index has	The South Wales branch felt that the Branch Liaison Officer's role was merely a channel for the MC to provide information to the branches, however DG stressed that communication could and should be two way. It was felt that it would be useful if this point was emphasized in a forthcoming Newsletter.	All present agreed that communication was satisfactory and that Alan Cooke's newsletters gave sufficient information. Gordon welcomed any suggestions to improve the AGM and officers conference. Although it was a nice idea for an MC representative to attend Branch AGMs, it was recognised this would be too heavy a workload. Delegates asked for the agenda for Regional meetings to be sent out much earlier, to enable branch committees to be consulted. Delegates were asked to encourage use of the website Forum.	It was felt that the communication between the MC, Branch Officers & members was often lacking, it was suggested that all Branch Secretaries should forward Alan Cooke's Newsletters to all their committee members, it appeared that this was not the case & was leading to a breakdown of knowledge between committee members. A problem had been experienced in trying to switch from the homepage on the Society's website to an appropriate link. DK suggested that David Jackman was still the best contact at present for these type problems until the new website is up & running.		It has been stated in many Newsletter that if any branch officer submits their e-mail details to Alan Cooke then they will receive the Newsletters direct. NHC branches may need to discuss this issue at their next branch committee meetings. The MC takes note that the Regional Meetings agenda needs to be published earlier for future meetings. Many branches have set up their own e-mail lists for distributing information to their local members.

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HOW DOES YOUR BRANCH ENCOURAGE MEMBERS TO CONTRIBUTE TO THE RO	Reg Wood issued an 'appeal' for more articles from members – even relatively short contributions on their personal travels. Les Brackstone thought that the UK scene was becoming monotonous and suggested more coverage of European and overseas subjects.	The editor of the Railway Observer urged all branches to send suitably captioned photographs in for consideration for publishing. The Furness Lakes and Lune Branch had greatly missed the photographic contributions made to the RO by the sad loss of Peter Robinson. The other three Branches also had their photographic stalwarts, and three or four members of these Branches contribute regularly to the RO. The region as a whole thus makes a considerable photographic contribution to the Society magazine.	It was felt that the news coverage for the region was good. The best way to encourage support from photographers is to use contributions from as many members as possible. The repeated use of photographs from the editor and a small group of photographers does nothing to encourage contributions from branch members.	Some local Ed. Reps. were not on email, which made submissions more difficult. Some members had been discouraged from submitting photos when previous submissions had not been published, without a reason being given, and even receipt had not been acknowledged. Gordon replied that 150 photographs were received every month so personal replies to everyone were not possible. The decision on which photos to publish was made by the RO editor after the selection had been narrowed by the images editor.	DK explained how sometimes it proved difficult to get accurate & proper detail to accompany photographs & reports submitted for inclusion in the RO. DK went on to explain how the web sites "Open Time Trains" & "Real Time Trains" can prove useful in helping to identify the various workings, but one needs to be very careful with information publishes on local gen sites. On the other hand information from known reliable sources is always very welcome		All members should be encouraged at branch meetings to submit articles and photographs for inclusion in the RO.
HOW DOES YOU BRANCH LOCATE SPEAKERS.	It was noted that Branch Committee members' contact knowledge, references to R.O. Branch reports, and to local society programmes were the main means of identifying speakers. An agenda-item for the Group meetings should include submission of each Branch's recent programme would be useful	Regarding the organisation of speakers, Furness, Lakes and Lune Branch led the way in using a word-of-mouth approach to getting speakers, and also in inviting speakers who had been previously and proved popular. This included modern topics, such as speakers from DRS and FTP, whose presentations were well attended. In similar vein, the Merseyside, Chester and North Wales Branch found that a presentation by a member of British Transport Police had been well attended. Both West Midlands and Lancashire and North Western Branches follow the above branches in using a mixture of previous popular speakers and being able to invite new speakers who had been recommended by other branches. A word of caution was sounded about the possibility of getting a hard-sell speaker, who could end up putting off any non-members present at the meeting. This had already happened.	Speakers are selected from presentations at other local meetings, RO meeting reports, and word of mouth. The cost of transport and accommodation means that speakers are generally sourced for the local area.	Branches used personal knowledge and contacts, the RO and general research to find speakers. Most branches discussed a draft programme at a committee meeting. Speaker's expenses varied but were generally reasonable. The work needed to maintain a register of speakers meant that it was not feasible. Gordon said the MC were looking for fresh ideas on this subject.	All Branches in attendance here all seem to use similar methods when it comes to locating speakers. We all look at who other Branches have booked via the RO Branch reports, recommendations from members at meetings, exhibitions etc. & occasionally when talking to someone you have met, there seemed to be no specific method attached to how we achieve this.		

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BRANCHES" PLANS TO INCREASE MEMBERSHIP.	The £15 current offer had not been sufficiently emphasised at Branch meetings, and the difficulty regarding sales stands is noted earlier. Meetings publicity to promote attendances combined with frequently announcing of this offer should be actioned. However, recruitment is running at record levels, and this current year is forecast to see an increase in membership numbers.	In response to the question of whether the yearly Recruitment Campaign was mentioned at meetings, and at sales stands or exhibitions, some variance in Branch response was noted. Furness, Lakes and Lune and West Midlands Branches in fact mention the offer for visiting non-members. Further, the West Midlands Branch pointed out that in ceasing to attend the Warley Meeting in favour of fresh alternative venues, this could give more opportunity to quote the Recruitment Offer. Merseyside, Chester and North Wales Branch response was one of reflecting the national picture. This left the Lancashire and North Western Branch stating they had not always quoted the offer, but felt determined to remedy this omission by remembering before or during every meeting to follow the national required practice.	Most branches have promoted the recruitment campaign. At Bristol each non-member had received a back number RO containing a Recruitment Initiative Membership Form which had produced results however promotion at the O Gauge Exhibition had not resulted in any new members.	Delegates commented that they didn't know the origin of new members and therefore didn't know how successful recruitment drives at exhibitions, meetings etc. had been. The meeting asked how many members renewed after the initial year. Gordon replied that David Goddard was supplying up to date information and he would investigate that. The MC believes that recruitment is currently going well. South Essex had recruited 12 new members, largely attracted by the £15 subscription. Solent makes an effort to recruit visitors but few are interested in joining.	All Branches should have membership packs available & visible at meetings, exhibitions & anywhere you might be when other like minded people are involved. The constant nagging & probing of visitors at meetings seems to have little effect, but the most important is a direct personal approach but a Branch member		Our Membership Secretary is working on how to display which "£15 Members" renew their members at the appropriate time.

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WHERE DO YOU SEE THE BRANCH IN TEN YEARS TIME	All foresaw a reduction in meetings activities and possible amalgamations at local level. Enthusiasts have 'instant access' to electronic information, and maybe only need indoor meetings for the historical aspects of the hobby. Smaller Branches may become unviable.	All four attending branches declared a heavy dose of realism in hoping to maintain attendance levels at meetings over a significant period of time, albeit with considerable effort being made to keep these levels up, and indeed to keep the concept of indoor meetings going. In these times of such rapid change in many levels of group activities it was felt that a back to basics statement of intent was worth stating. The Furness, Lakes and Lune delegates suggested that one of their Branch members John Holloway could help in his role of Media Consultant to help to keep younger members in the Society. The Merseyside, Chester and North Wales Branch questioned the number of branches within the Society, inasmuch as whether the next ten years might be accompanied by a change in Branch numbers, probably a decrease rather than an expansion.	The South Wales branch felt confident that the branch will continue to thrive in 10 years time. Over the last year a considerable number of new officers have been elected to the committee when their predecessors have stood down. The other branches present accepted that this was essential if they were to survive. New technology such as Web Presentations, Video Links, Web Seminars, and recorded presentations that could be played back might be commonplace in 10 years time. The SW Branch felt it was of interest that the Agenda has asked us where our Branch will be in 10 years time yet does the MC have any idea where the Society will be in that time?	Some branches were concerned about their long term future. This would be due to the shortage of committee members, ageing membership, use of the Internet to obtain information, increased pressures on those working and people needing to delay their retirement. Gordon remarked that, realistically, the current recruitment drive was targeted at the 45 to 50 plus age group.	Branches found this quite difficult to answer, but thought we should keep our committee's in tact to keep going, but the modern age people & our prospective new members also belong to social media railway groups & more often than not get their information on line & just get together socially rather than in organised groups.		The MC is positive that the RCTS will still be in existence in 10 years time. Various initiatives are in progress to keep the society prospering and thriving.

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RECRUITING NEW MEMBERS ON RAILTOURS	There is a need to distribute membership information on Heritage Railways and on Railtours. Branches are asked to identify suitable outlets and members who could pursue this.	Several members present had either tried to get passengers on rail tours interested in Society leaflets, with a view to recruitment to the Society, with only limited if any success. Furness, Lakes and Lune have developed a rack-size leaflet with a list of indoor meetings on it. It is felt that such a leaflet in multiple distribution with an easy-to- find-and-keep format might help local recruitment, and other branches showed interest in this idea.	PU distributed 300 membership leaflets on a recent Pathfinder Rail Tour which had produced no response. On the same train 40 back number ROs with Recruitment Initiative Membership Forms were distributed which resulted in one new member. This would suggest that the RO is better recruiting material than the membership form, although a new leaflet is being produced.	No branches offered to distribute leaflets on rail tours.	Under this item we primarily discussed the work of the DSC & how this committee was progressing the promotion & development of the Society. One major way to promote the Society is to have someone to distribute our leaflets on Rail tours & excursion trains, this has always been an idea put forward by Eric Palmer. John Day (Ipswich) is in fact doing just this on a rail tour today as he did also last weekend, he also takes a few membership packs with him. It was to early to be able to get any real feedback to how this was working.		

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AOB							
DONATIONS AT MEETINGS	Most Branches request £2 from members and £3 from visitors						
BRANCH ASSISTANCE FROM NATIONAL FUNDS	This could be available to a Branch in serious difficulty, but only on a short-term basis.						
OFFICERS' HANDBOOK				An update to the Officers Handbook is in progress.			
BRANCH SECRETARIES				Gordon would raise the matter of continuing free subscriptions for branch secretaries at the MC.			
MEMBERS' HANDBOOK				A member's handbook of 8 pages was in draft and would be issued to all members once a location for the archive/library was finalised.			
EXPENSES				Claims for expenses for this meeting should be referred to branch treasurers.			
FUTURE MEETINGS				It was agreed that the meeting had been useful, but for future meetings this would depend on the relevance of the agenda.			
BRANCH MEETING REPORTS.					It was requested by Northampton Branch that Members who write about the Branch meetings each month should refrain from mentioning poor attendances & any other negative comments.		It is up to each branch correspondent to report on their meetings as they are. The mention of low attendances is a reminder to members that they should attend the meetings.
BRANCH RECRUITMENT			The SW branch has been giving away ROs to non-members at meetings, however in the future these will only be used to promote new members				