

THE RAILWAY OBSERVER

86th ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
Grand Station, Wolverhampton
Saturday 9th April 2022



THE RAILWAY CORRESPONDENCE AND TRAVEL SOCIETY



Britain's leading railway society
– still observing after 94 years

www.rcts.org.uk



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

The 86th Annual General Meeting of the Society

Grand Station, Sun Street, Wolverhampton, WV10 0BF and on Zoom with Member Participation

Saturday 9th April 2022, commencing at 13.15

AGENDA

The meeting will be conducted according to the Rules of the Society

1. **Welcome and Introduction by the Society Chairman – Callum MacLeod.**
2. **Apologies for Absence**
3. **To confirm the Minutes of the 85th Annual General Meeting, held as a Virtual Conference on 19th June 2021, and matters arising therefrom.**
4. **Address by the Society's President – Rev'd Canon Brian Arman.**
5. **Adoption of Reports:**
 - a) Adoption of the Reports of the Chairman, Group Leaders and Officers, as published in the AGM Supplement to the April 2022 issue of *The Railway Observer*.
 - b) Adoption of the Financial Report for the year ending 31st October, 2021.
6. **Proposal from the BoT that the Rules of the Society be amended as follows:**

Rule 1b – entire wording to be replaced with: 'These Rules were first adopted by at least 75% of the Society's members present and voting at the AGM in Coventry on 16th April 2016 and have been amended by at least 75% of the Society's members present and voting at subsequent Society AGMs. This version took effect from the date shown at the end of these Rules.'

Rule 2d (co-option to BoT) – within this rule replace 'until the 31st May' with: 'until one month after the next AGM', and replace 'beyond the 1st June' with: 'beyond one month after the next AGM'. The rest of this Rule to be unaltered.

Rule 6c – entire wording to be replaced with: 'Members (apart from a life member) shall contribute a combined membership and magazine fee at rates and intervals to be determined by the BoT.'

Rule 6d – entire wording to be replaced with: 'A former member whose membership has lapsed may not use any reduced-price membership offer to rejoin the Society until a period of twelve months has elapsed since their membership of the Society ceased.'

Rule 6g – delete this rule and renumber Rule 6h to 6g.

Rule 11c – entire wording to be replaced with: 'The rule shall be proposed at the AGM of the Society and must be adopted by at least 75% of those present and voting.'

Rule 11e – entire wording to be replaced with: 'A new rule, adopted as above, shall take effect from one month after the date of the AGM unless a ballot is required as in Rule 11d above when it shall take effect from one month after the announcement of the result of the ballot.'

Rule 11f – entire wording to be replaced with: 'When exceptional circumstances outwith the control of the Society require the date(s) of these events to be changed from those normally applicable, any new rule or amendment thereto shall take effect from one month after the date of the relevant AGM, or ballot, provided they have otherwise been passed in accordance with the provisions of Rules 1a to 1e above.'

Rule 12b – entire wording to be replaced with: 'The date when decisions taken at the AGM shall be implemented, including the appointment or re-appointment of members of the BoT, will be one month after that AGM or one month after any subsequent ballot taken in accordance with Rule 11d above.'

[Note: The reasons for each of these proposed amendments to the Rules were included with the statutory notice of the BoT's intentions, as shown on p.210, March 2022 RO.]
7. **The re-appointment of Trustees for a further period of three years:**
 - a) David Bird
 - b) Reg Wood
 - c) Mike Robinson
8. **Appointment of Independent Examiners.**

The BoT will recommend to the meeting that R.S. Porter & Co. be reappointed as Independent Examiners.
9. **To confirm the date and venue for the 2023 Annual General Meeting.**
10. **Any other previously notified business.**

Callum MacLeod, Society Chairman (in the absence since 1st February 2022 of a Society Secretary).

The Minutes of the Annual General Meeting (excluding the PowerPoint slides used to supplement sections of Item 11 of those Minutes) held via Video Conferencing on 19th June 2021 were published in pp.642 to 643 of the September 2021 RO. Members wishing to obtain a hard copy (including the said PowerPoint slides) may do so by forwarding a C5 size SAE to the Society Chairman.

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Callum MacLeod

Although I took over from Gordon Davies in May 2020 and have conducted two AGMs since then, this is the first one where most of us will be meeting face-to-face which, in my opinion, is how a *society* should conduct its affairs. Of course, had it not been for the really convenient facility afforded by Zoom, the RCTS would almost have come to a standstill insofar as any meetings are concerned and we would be considerably in arrears in respect of our constitutional requirement to hold Annual General Meetings at a minimum interval of fifteen months. However, it's nice to be back – and in a such a splendid new location for an AGM, being within the building which once served as the GWR's Wolverhampton Low Level station.

At the time I am penning this report, the BoT is not sure if it is feasible to conduct the AGM as a hybrid session so that those members who are not able to get to Wolverhampton can still join in using Zoom. I am in discussion with the facilitators at the Grand Station venue and, should a hybrid facility prove to be a practical option, then our Webmaster will circulate an e-mail to those who are signed up to receive his monthly newsletter. Nevertheless, it would be much nicer if as many members as possible could get to Wolverhampton for the Members' Day on 9th April and I look forward to welcoming everyone to the day's events.

Despite all the various recent problems affecting travel and socialising, the BoT has continued to function effectively. Most of our meetings over the past year have been conducted via Zoom, but we did manage our first face-to-face meeting since 1st February 2020 when we met at our usual venue in London's Somers Town on 27th November last year. Although the meeting went very well, this turned out to be a poor choice of date for myself because Storm Arwen struck the north-east the previous afternoon, closing the ECML an hour after I had passed through and keeping it shut for the next two days. I had an interesting but rather convoluted journey back to my home in Crieff via Euston, Birmingham, Glasgow and Edinburgh!

As I reported at last year's AGM, the Society's new form of governance came into being from late November 2020 and has proved very effective with the four new Governance Groups (Administration, Finance, Commercial and Strategy) all functioning under remits approved by the BoT and, indeed, with each led by a Trustee who reports back to the BoT as required. Again, these groups have met on a regular basis, mostly via Zoom or through email exchanges, but occasional face-to-face meetings have occurred when allowed under the prevailing government restrictions surrounding the covid pandemic. It is the on-going pandemic that has revealed a flaw within our Rules which contain specific dates when appointments should be made or AGM resolutions adopted – because these have always been easy to achieve during the decades when there were no such things as legal limitations on travel and meetings. At the same time, a few other minor problems have been identified within the revised Rules which were adopted at the 2020 AGM and the BoT is addressing these at today's meeting. Details of our proposals (including the reasons for each suggested change) were contained in my report on p.230, March *RO*.

During 2021 the BoT welcomed the appointment of James Milne and Matthew Shaw as Trustees and bade farewell to David Kelso who had been one of the original twelve when the society became a CIO back in 2016. David's departure created a vacancy which we had hoped to fill at last year's AGM but, at the last minute, the sole candidate withdrew. This vacancy still exists and, if anyone would care to contribute towards the important task of running the RCTS, then perhaps they could contact me for further details.

A major loss to the BoT occurred at the end of January when our hard-working and efficient Society Secretary, Geoff Adams, had to step down because of his worsening health problems. We were extremely sorry to see him go, although it is typical of this loyal member that he still found time to write the opening Administration Group report which follows on the next page. One piece of good news, however, is that just before his resignation, Geoff had appointed former Trustee Paul Chancellor to the long-vacant role of Minutes Taker, which removes one task from whoever takes over as Society Secretary.

The past year has also been marred by the sad loss of several members, all of whom will be greatly missed. Notable amongst these was Vice President Hugh Gould who, of course, had previously served as our President for a record-breaking 23 years from 1992 to 2015. Together with our current President, Canon Brian Arman and other RCTS members, I was pleased to be able to attend his funeral in Barrhead earlier this year. A full tribute to Hugh appeared in last month's *RO*.

I am now starting my final year as Society Chairman because I previously indicated when first appointed that I would only serve for three years and would retire following the 2023 AGM. By that point, I will be in my 75th year and I feel it would be far better for the RCTS to be led by a younger member, capable of continuing in the role (if so appointed by the members) for many more years to come.

As usual, I must conclude by thanking my fellow Trustees for their continuing loyal support and, indeed, every Society officer and member who has stepped forward to assist the Society and thus help ensure that the RCTS remains "Britain's Leading Railway Society"

GOVERNANCE GROUP REPORTS TO THE SOCIETY

ADMINISTRATION GROUP

AG1. GEOFF ADAMS, SOCIETY SECRETARY (to 31/01/22)

The AGM Supplement is published, as usual, to inform members of the general progress the Society has made in the past year and plans for the future. Group Leaders give detailed information in the accompanying reports below, regarding their specific areas of responsibility.

The Administration Group continues to consist of myself, Irene Rabbitts (Branch Liaison Officer (BLO)) and David Goddard (Membership Officer); a volunteer to fill the vacancy for a Minutes Taker has at last been found, and he will be taking up the post early in 2022. The Board of Trustees (BoT) have been meeting at approximately two-monthly intervals and, once approved, the minutes are posted to the Society website, though redactions continue to apply where deemed necessary. All but one meeting was held via the medium of Zoom, the one exception being a hybrid meeting held on the 27th November, with some Trustees meeting face-to-face at the Somers Town Coffee House, London N1, and others joining in via a video link; this particular meeting being noteworthy for Callum MacLeod, the Society Chairman, chairing the first face-to-face meeting since he took over from the previous incumbent, Gordon Davies.

The 2021 AGM, the 85th of the Society and fifth as a CIO, was again delayed from its normal late April date until the 19th of June, and was also, thanks to the Covid-19 situation, again held via Video Conferencing (Zoom). At this meeting, long-serving member David Kelso stood down as a Trustee, new Trustees James Milne and Matthew Shaw were appointed and David Goddard, Irene Rabbitts and John Redgate were re-appointed as Trustees. One minor change to the Rules was accepted by the members present, as was a proposal to potentially alter the Constitution at the 2022 AGM. Following later discussion by the Trustees, it was agreed that an amendment to the Constitution would not be required, though further changes to the Rules have been formulated and appear as per the Agenda for the 2022 AGM. Our thanks are again extended to a member (who wishes to remain anonymous) for his considerable input to the proposed Rule changes – his legal background being a great help. I am pleased to report that the minutes of the 2021 AGM appeared in the September 2021 *RO*, in a timelier manner than had been possible the previous year.

Unfortunately, Covid-related restraints on recruitment opportunities, such as at exhibitions or during face-to-face Branch meetings, remained for much of 2021, but membership levels remained stable. Once again, the work of Steve Ollive and David and Sally Goddard (the Renewals Team) and to Vron and Alan Cooke for their work in processing new membership applications is gratefully acknowledged.

With the exception of the Society Branch Liaison Officer, Irene Rabbitts, her AGM Report follows, much of the work of the Admin Group is unseen by the membership, but its existence is essential to the continued smooth running of the Society. For instance, during 2021 a new 'Complaints Handling' system was introduced, the 'Privacy Policy' reviewed, and research conducted as required, etc. The Society Secretary is also responsible for liaison with the Charity Commission, and a new format was introduced for the annual reports to them; to date, no queries have been raised, so I assume this was found to be satisfactory. Other, more routine work, is undertaken as required, with unusual and/or exceptional items being reported to the Trustees as and when necessary.

At the time of compiling this annual report, I have reluctantly had to resign my position as Society Secretary, due to worsening health conditions. It has been a privilege to serve in this capacity for just over the last year and a half, and I will be sad to depart. I must not do so before expressing my sincere thanks to Callum, our Chairman, Irene and David G, my Admin Group colleagues, and all of the Trustees, past and present, I have had the honour of working with during this time, for all their help and support; also, to all those Branch and/or individual members I've had the pleasure of liaising with. Health permitting, I hope to continue as a Committee member with the friends and colleagues of my local Chichester Branch, for as long as they will tolerate me. I wish my replacement, and the Society, continued success.

AG2. IRENE RABBITS, BRANCH LIAISON OFFICER

We have faced another extraordinary year but this time we could start to look forward again as restrictions eased. Branches have returned to face to face meetings, some are continuing with virtual meetings for now, using the Society's new Zoom licences, and others are working on a combination of both.

Firstly, I would like to thank all the branch committee members who put in the effort to keep the branches going; without this we would not have the branches and the Society would be a lot poorer. Unfortunately, I have to report here the closure of South East Branch due to insufficient volunteers coming forward to join the branch committee. Attracting new committee members seems to be a recurring issue for many branches but if we want to continue with a vibrant branch network we need branch committee members. So if you like your branch and wish to contribute, please come forward. If you do not like the way your branch operates, the same applies – come forward and help to make changes and perhaps improvements. With enough committee members, no one should have too much to do and there is always the opportunity to network with other branches too.

A quick reminder about what branches are for comes from our Constitutional Objectives: *“The formation and support of local branches of the Society with a view to providing a programme of speakers and visits so as to enable the public to study and understand various aspects of the practice of historic and current railway operation and railway heritage.”* However, I would say it is more than that – it is a way to get together in a social situation, whether face to face or virtually, to share our enthusiasm for railways as well as to learn and understand. It is the chance to communicate in person with others, i.e. visitors, guests, speakers, and to widen the appeal of the Society. In this vein, I have seen the variety of subjects and speakers at the branches. It is important to keep this variety going with a mix of subjects from history, technology, engineering, architecture, infrastructure and future developments. Just in case you have not guessed, or did not already know, I used to do fixtures at my own branch for a number of years and thoroughly enjoyed it, meeting some incredible people in the process.

There has been the usual round of queries and requests for information from individuals and branches over the year with some results more successful than others. Queries can range from where to find information, to contact details, to how to fix a problem. I do not have all the answers but I may know who to ask and sometimes just talking about a problem can help resolve it. There have been 11 *Officers Newsletters* this year, plus some shorter emails with more urgent items, and I hope each has provided useful information, from Society Insurance cover renewal to GDPR, Member Benefits and Easing Out of Lockdown amongst others.

Once again we had no Regional Meetings in 2021 but were lucky enough to enjoy the Annual Members' Weekend in Taunton in October – postponed from 2020 because of the pandemic. Due to the sad loss of Bristol Branch member Roger Newman, this was organised on the basis of the planning he had already done, and carried forward almost single-handedly by Reg Wood helped by his wife Jacky. Our thanks go to both for a very successful event.

As part of that weekend we were able to hold the Officers' Conference on Sunday 24th October 2021 with a slightly different format this time. After the usual essential items on the agenda, there was discussion of activities over the past 18 months, meetings in all forms, i.e. physical, virtual, hybrid, with discussions on what had worked – or not, shared experiences, and conclusions about the way forward. There was a short item on publications followed by a demonstration on using Mailjet for group e-mails and the upgrades to the website from our new Webmaster Matthew Shaw. This was a great opportunity to share opinions, suggestions and concerns, with feedback going both ways between Branch and other Society officers and Trustees. I found this very encouraging as people really seemed to be talking and listening to each other.

So while we have had another unusual year, thank you to everyone who has provided me personally with encouragement to continue to try and support everyone at the branches, even when it seemed to be hard going. It is everyone's contribution that has made it work and this is greatly appreciated.



Above - Rodney Lissenden

Below - Neville Wellings



FINANCE GROUP
REG WOOD, SOCIETY TREASURER

ANNUAL FINANCIAL REPORT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31st OCTOBER 2021

This report covers the Society's financial affairs for the year from 1st November 2020 to 31st October 2021.

This second year of operating under the Covid controls has brought further challenges to both the Society and enthusiasts generally, with the 'travel' in our title being seriously constrained. Members with unplanned time on their hands made our Zoom meetings programme very well supported, and our publications sales delivered a boost to our finances from greater sales. Later in the year we managed to hold our national Members' Weekend which proved popular and successful. Branch indoor meetings were resumed so local funds generation resumed.

The overall financial outcome for the year was a surplus of £3,452 compared with £3,200 in the previous year.

It is a Society policy for magazine fees for *The Railway Observer* to cover the costs of its production, printing and despatch. This has been achieved again in 2020/21. A review of our Life Membership Fund with the future liability for funding the *RO* led to a £3,000 increased provision and Nil released this year. Our policy is to use income from publication sales, bank interest and donations from members to maintain the annual subscription below what would otherwise be needed if all other running costs were to be met directly from the subscription.

Publication sales almost trebled at £17,836 (last year £6,353) with the launch of two books, **Brush Diesel and Electric Locos 1980-2020**, and **Michael Mensing – Railway Photographer Vol.1**, and reprints of two BR Standard Locos titles, an overall investment of almost £8,000. **The Journey** sales have suffered with bookshops closed, though half of the print run has been sold. Publications achieved a surplus of £7,063 after recent years break evens and deficits. Excess stock provisions have been reviewed to write down stock valuations of slower selling titles and binders. Publications stock is valued at the lower of cost or forecast sale value and was £17,156 at Year End after provisions of £14,722. This represents 11.5 months of sales.

Our income from membership subscriptions grew 6% this year to £69,197, and our funds inflow from donations and gift aid breaking records at £10,494 and £3,893. These figures are 50% of receipts, the balance being capitalised to cover future library costs. Sadly, our sale of images reduced.

During the year our investment in the Society image library continued with a further £600 spent adding 1,300 images.

The Railway Correspondence and Travel Society
ACCOUNTS FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31st OCTOBER 2021

REVENUE ACCOUNT
for the year ended 31st October 2021

	2021		2020	
	£	£	£	£
Publication Sales		17836		6353
Cost of Sales		<u>-10773</u>		<u>-5888</u>
		7063		465
Add: Other Income				
Magazine Fees	63352		59477	
Subscriptions	5845		5634	
less Membership costs	<u>-10262</u>		<u>-10012</u>	
		58935		55099
Bank Interest	148		1070	
Library/Archive	4166		7955	
Donations	15931		4272	
Sundry	<u>3279</u>		<u>2994</u>	
		<u>23524</u>		<u>16291</u>
		89522		71855
Less: Expenditure				
<i>Railway Observer</i>	51717		46012	
Society administration	8602		6976	
Independent examination	820		800	
Branch expenditure	43		49	
Library/Archive	7364		8739	
Sundry activities	-37		168	
Life Membership Fund Provision	3000		0	
Depreciation	<u>14561</u>		<u>5911</u>	
		<u>86070</u>		<u>68655</u>
Surplus before taxation		3452		3200
Taxation		<u>0</u>		<u>-100</u>
Surplus for the year		3452		3300
Retained surplus brought forward		104185		100885
Retained surplus carried forward		<u><u>107637</u></u>		<u><u>104185</u></u>

The Railway Correspondence and Travel Society
ACCOUNTS FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31st OCTOBER 2021

BALANCE SHEET
as at 31 October 2021

	2021		2020
	£	£	£
ASSETS EMPLOYED			
FIXED ASSETS		29788	43026
CURRENT ASSETS			
Stock	20200		19027
Debtors and prepayments	4447		4681
Cash and bank balances	226728		184710
	<u>251375</u>		<u>208418</u>
CURRENT LIABILITIES			
Creditors	52702		33557
Branches Investment Funds	15694		10694
VAT	230		1081
Magazine Fees and subscriptions	18610		28485
	<u>87236</u>		<u>73817</u>
NET CURRENT ASSETS		164139	134601
NET ASSETS		<u>193927</u>	<u>177627</u>
FINANCED BY:			
Retained Surplus		107637	104185
Library Capital Fund		25151	27946
Amortised Donations/Gift Aid		31826	19183
Life Membership Fund		29313	26313
		<u>193927</u>	<u>177627</u>

A. R. Wood FCMA CGMA MAPM FMAAT
Society Treasurer

INDEPENDENT EXAMINERS REPORT

My examination was carried out in accordance with the General Directions given by the Charity Commission. An examination includes a review of the accounting records kept by the charity and a comparison of the accounts presented with those records. It also includes consideration of any unusual items or disclosures in the accounts, and seeking explanations from you as trustees concerning any such matters. The procedures undertaken do not provide all the evidence that would be required in an audit and, consequently, no opinion is given as to whether the accounts present a "true and fair view" and the report is limited to those matters set out in the statement below.

In connection with my examination, no matter has come to my attention:

1. which gives me reasonable cause to believe that, in any material respect, the requirements to keep accounting records in accordance with section 130 of the Charities Act 2011; and to prepare accounts which accord with the accounting records, comply with the accounting requirements of the 2011 Act. and with the methods and principles of the Statement of Recommended Practice: Accounting and Reporting by Charities (revised 2005) have not been met; or
2. to which, in my opinion, attention should be drawn in order to enable a proper understanding of the accounts to be reached.

Christopher J Keates-Porter FCA
R S Porter & Co Limited
Chartered Accountants (ICAEW)
26 March 2022

The Old Dairy, Ashton Hill Farm
Weston Road, Failand
Bristol
BS8 3US

COMMERCIAL GROUP

MIKE ROBINSON, COMMERCIAL OFFICER

Note: Under an agreement set up when the new governance groups came into being from November 2020, the role of Commercial Officer (i.e. leader of this group) will alternate annually between the Publications Officer and the Managing Editor, The Railway Observer. Thus, David Bird was the Commercial Officer throughout 2021, but Mike Robinson took on that role for 2022. This arrangement has been endorsed by the BoT.

CG1, DAVID BIRD, PUBLICATIONS OFFICER

PUBLICATION SALES (2020/21):

During the year Sales increased year on year. This was due mainly to the publication of two new titles. Firstly into play was the BRUSH Traction book. We printed 500 books but actually received 525 into stock. Sales immediately went into overdrive with slightly over 300 sold in the first six months. Sales have now reduced to a slow but steady progress. However, it has cleared its cost, so we are into a profit situation.

The second one to press was the long-awaited Mensing album which was titled an Introduction to Michael Mensing. We printed 500 copies (exact number received) and it went on sale in September. Despite only two months sales in this financial year we did move 307 copies in that time. This was very encouraging and means that we are already into profit with this title.

In the financial year 2020/21 we moved 1,270 books compared with 442 books in the previous year, which, as stated, was a pleasant increase in sales.

We also sold Easibinders A5 size (161) plus B5 size (56), the last three CD-ROMs but no ties.

NEW or UPDATED PROJECTS:

Our team of authors continue to research and prepare future titles for publication.

Our digital printing project continues to grow, apart from Mensing which is now in print. We will certainly consider Volume 2 in the not too distant future. We have other digital picture projects in hand and expect that there may be one published in 2022. Others are still the subject of preparation.

The next book in the LMS series (Royal Scots) nears completion. Text is written and pictures are currently being placed within the book outline. Quotations will then be sought before the final decision to print is made, but the title will be out in 2022.

Work continues on the 8F locomotives. This is a collaboration between the RCTS and the Stanier 8F Locomotive Society. Work is in hand and progress continues in a steady fashion despite members of team being unable to visit record offices and the like.

A book on DMUs has been offered to us by Michael Welch and this is now in the course of preparation. Three authors are constructing the album for our attention for printing and they are liaising with us on outline style and other items in that project. Possible printing may be later in 2022.

Booklaw continue to handle the Storage and Distribution aspect of our business in an efficient and timely manner.

The committee met on a number of occasions during the year to manage the activities of the publication group. These meetings, by reason of the pandemic, were mainly held by video conference or just by telephone calls and lengthy e-mails.

The composition of the committee has changed. David Kelso and Roger Sandford have left the ranks. We send them on their way to other tasks with the grateful thanks of the committee for their efforts over many years. As a result we have added to the ranks the following: Matthew Shaw and Paul Chancellor. Thanks to them for offering their services.

There is also a need for others to assist in the committee's work and anybody with knowledge of working with print, publications or developing ideas to titles is asked to contact myself (David Bird) for a discussion on what they might be able to offer the team.

We still need help on selling our publications to other outlets. This holds true for all our commercial activities and therefore I make my normal plea to you all – does anybody have or know somebody that has sales knowledge that the RCTS can use. Offers to help to me please.

CG2, ANDY DAVIES, CHIEF ARCHIVIST

ARCHIVE AND LIBRARY

Another year of limited opening days and visitors due to the Covid-19 pandemic restrictions. For the first three and last two months of 2021 we had no open days at all, although regular visits were made to check the building.

From April to October, 14 open days were arranged which attracted 39 visitors, considerably more than for the same number of open days in 2020. A much-postponed visit by a group of UK library and information association (CILIP) members was held in September.

Once travel restrictions were relaxed, trips were made to examine various collections from deceased members. Although it is not possible to accept all that is offered we have added to our collections significantly. We thank all members who donate material to the Archive and Library.

Members continued collecting material from Leatherhead to work on at home, especially the photograph collection. Members are now being recruited to restart the task of scanning the archive. It is intended to scan as much as we can and then have the scans to work with. Once evaluated we can then store the image or place a copy on the website for research and potential sale of images to members and the public. Once each scan is made, the original images will be returned to the archive for safe storage.

Your Archivist receives many varied requests for assistance and information, some of which are relatively simple and some which need assistance of RCTS members, which is gratefully received. Not all enquiries can be fully answered but we endeavour to give as full an answer as possible and to give guidance on further avenues of research. Examples of the sort of enquiries received are:

- Details / biographies of several notable people.
- Request for a book on Caledonian Railway stationery.
- A request for the "Railfreight Design Guide".
- A discussion regarding LNER shed codes.
- Norwegian railway photographs.

CG3, MATTHEW SHAW, WEBMASTER

2021 was a year of transition arising from changes initiated by the Society's new Webmaster. The main highlights were release of a wholly new website and the launch of a monthly email newsletter, *RCTS News*.

Staying true to the Society's voluntary ethos, the new website was released in November 2021 following a purely internal effort. The aims were to simplify the layout, improve the visual appeal, and adopt newer design conventions. Ours is a relatively complex website because it has around 40 editors for different parts, handles money (via the Shop), and has multiple types of online order to be routed correctly. There were over 800 pages and 50,000 images to migrate. Nevertheless, this was done on time for under £500.

The Forum was withdrawn due to insufficient activity on it, and *Mystery Photographs* suspended until – we hope – later in 2022.

The new site uses off-the-shelf software everywhere, with almost no customisation. It was important to simplify under-the-covers, to remove a key dependency on specialist technical skills. Managing a website is a skill, like many others, but the tools we have adopted would be broadly familiar to most web developers.

It was important to hand over responsibility for adding new content to the branches and other specialist editors. A series of videos explaining how to perform the main tasks was prepared and has been well used by editors. A new 'Events Calendar' is used to present physical and virtual meetings and can be maintained by branch representatives. Some branches have embraced the opportunity to add local interest material to their pages.

A new way of presenting the photograph archive was adopted. It encourages users to browse and appears to have been effective in generating more sales.

New members now receive an online survey, typically 2-6 weeks after joining. It provides some insights into why people join and more information to help prioritise where the Society's advertisements appear.

The *RCTS News* e-mail has been issued monthly since August 2021 to coincide with the *RO* becoming available. The e-mails complement the magazine by focussing on online topics – new features, book promotions, membership renewals and the like. Not every member has an e-mail address, but 82% do share theirs with the Society and the majority open the e-mails we send.

Social media remains a neglected part of the Society's offer. The Facebook page has proved very effective at reaching railfans, but it is too time-consuming for the Webmaster to handle alone, and we need a dedicated volunteer to take social media in hand.

We have come a long way in 12 months, and plans are being developed for more online services in 2022. There are always opportunities for new volunteers to help with website maintenance without it being onerous.

CG4, MIKE ROBINSON, MANAGING EDITOR

THE RAILWAY OBSERVER (VOLUME 91)

After the crisis of 2020 when we were not sure whether we could or indeed should publish all issues of the *RO* whilst the world in general and, the UK railway world in particular, was in almost complete fear-induced and government-promoted turmoil, it was good to get back to a world where a degree of rationality returned and the railway industry began to return to something resembling, at least in service terms its normal self. So, unlike 2020, we were never in danger of not having news to publish and both our topic editors and you the members enthusiastically made sure we could fill our 76 pages each month without the special appeals for source material characteristic of 2020.

Not only did we fill our monthly quota of pages with news and features but we at last achieved our long-held ambition of increasing the page size of the magazines with a re-launch of the *RO* in January 2021 at its new B5 size. Compared with the old A5 format, B5 increases the space in the magazine by around 18%, offering a commensurate increase in the size of all image reproduction, plus around a 9% increase in space for more material, plus a 9% increase in the font size of all printed text appearing in the magazine, this latter hopefully making the *RO* more easily readable for our older members.

With over a years-worth of B5-size *RO*'s now produced, the reaction to the increased size and its overall higher production standard has been entirely positive, as we had long believed it would be. We are delighted with the membership response and we are extremely grateful to all those both within the Society and at our print suppliers who over a period of some years helped achieve this transition.

The digital version of *The Railway Observer* continued to appear using the highly successful Pagesuite package continued during 2021, though during the latter part of the year a possible alternative was being evaluated.

Whilst the change in size of the *RO* increased 2021 production costs by around 4%, over the ten-year period since 2012, when we moved to Amadeus, *Railway Observer* production – embracing all print, mailing and editorial operations, the launch of the Pagesuite digital service and the introduction of the B5 size *RO* – increased costs across the ten years period by only 14%, whilst, over the same period, the annual membership subscription rate increased by over 33%.

Although lockdowns continued into 2021, restricting the ability of some of our members to get out and about, fortunately most of our regular news and image suppliers were able to continue supplying us with the lifeblood of the *RO*, the reports and images of continuing, though still almost weekly variable, rail operations.

As regards team matters there have been no significant changes with both Richard Neale and Laurence Bindley having picked up respectively, Preservation/Urban and International at the start of last year as indeed reported at last years' 'Zoomed' 2020 AGM. However, we have lost our rail industry column as Paul Chancellor has now stepped back from that role.

We continue to seek potential new members for the Editorial team and with the positive member response to the ad-hoc articles generated during lockdown, are now interested in identifying a volunteer to assist in preparing such items, based on member submissions, for future use in the *RO*.

We have also long had a desire to add a regular feature on freight rolling stock as this

currently seems to generate much attention amongst the wider enthusiast fraternity but is entirely absent from the *RO*. If you feel you could contribute to this or have other ideas for regular features contact the Managing Editor at the usual address and hopefully we can add even further interest to the *RO*. Likewise, the Observer's Library feature seems popular despite the fact that it is usually penned by Trustees, a situation we had not intended and we would welcome contributions from all members who are keen readers on the railway subject.

The high quality of images appearing in the *RO* is frequently the subject of the plaudits we get in respect of *The Railway Observer* and for this we have to thank the efforts of a large number of photographers who regularly provided us with some excellent, often ground-breaking images. During 2021, excluding the Managing Editor, whose archive often gets raided for special features, the work of no less than 74 photographers appeared, and whilst many of those long standing regular contributors, 10% of the images used were from members who had never previously had work published. It is by no means a closed 'old boys' and if as a photographer you have something to contribute, don't hold back – particularly if you live in one of those sadly photographically under represented areas in the – such as the north east, the southern ECML, the Thames Valley, and the WCML south of Crewe.

However, as well as the photographers, thanks must also go to both our Imaging Editors and Amadeus' graphic team who between them seem to extract ever last usable pixel from some of the dramatic images we receive taken in the frequently drab British weather.

Finally a usual thank you to the *RO* team of 25 editors, all of whom put up with my constant whinging about the importance of doorstep delivery timescale but each of whom contributes enormously to the magazine of 'Britains Leading Railway Society'.

Below - Stephen Willets



STRATEGY GROUP

JAMES MILNE, DEVELOPMENT OFFICER

In its first full year since its evolution from the old Development Committee, the Strategy Group assembled for six business meetings in 2021, albeit only one of these was in person in September. In addition to virtual meetings in January, March, May, August and November, members got together for a festive and social Zoom shortly before Christmas.

The Group continues to operate at full strength, although we have witnessed some little turnover in membership. Robert Freeman (Watford Branch) resigned in March, feeling that membership of the group was not for him; Dave Coxon (East Midlands) left in May as he had been appointed chairman of the local Institute of Mechanical Engineers Railway Division. In August we lost a stalwart member of the group in Roger Sandford (Chichester) for personal reasons, and thus faced a significant 'gap' in experience as Roger was the Society's Publicity Officer. On behalf of the Society as a whole, I would give sincerest thanks to the contributions, be they large or small, from these individuals and wish them health and happiness for the future.

Welcomes to the Strategy Group are due to Richard Whitehead (Solent) who joined in May, David Jackman (Croydon & South London) in August and Keith Merritt (Surrey) in September.

The need to recruit a replacement Publicity Officer occurred at the same time as we were looking for potential contributors for the monthly RCTS column in *The Railway Magazine*. As a recently retired career railwayman, Keith Merritt showed interest in the RM role, and showed a level of expertise that attracted my interest, with the result that I was extremely pleased to appoint him as Publicity Officer.

Keith now also has a team of some four writers for the "Then and Now" column in the RM, who have engineered a seamless transition since October 2021 replacing Paul Chancellor. I will make no other observation than that we now have a team of volunteers to do the work previously carried out by Paul!

Underpinning the work of the Strategy Group throughout 2021 was its 'Action Plan' and associated elements. Some of these specific initiatives and work programs completed during the past year included the migration to a new, more user-friendly, up-to-date website, which has also eliminated single key-man dependencies; recommending a publications strategy; revising advertising flyer wording; decision-making on the merits of Microsoft Teams versus Zoom as the Society's preferred web conferencing platform; cloud computing recommendations; ways to widen the apparent reach of the Society; and the appointment of a Nameplate Administrator (David Cross).

Following a face-to-face brainstorming session for the Group at the end of September 2021, a new 'Action Plan for 2022' was presented to the Trustees in December, having been endorsed by the Strategy Group the month before. Some of the highlights of this plan were revealed in February's 2022 *Running Lines* and need no repetition here. Suffice to say, that some of the elements contained in the Strategy Group's planning may never come to pass, yet others will emerge during the course of 2022, as is normal with a desire to pursue continual improvement in the Society's offer and attractiveness to new joiners.

Our current Strategy for 2022 is predicated on three main structural elements, namely:

- Attracting New Membership
- Improving Membership Retention
- Enhancing The Society's 'Product'

In terms of attracting new memberships, the Society experienced what could be termed a "good Covid lockdown". Often we were the only railway society which maintained a level of activity to maintain contact with its own membership, but also attracted a whole host of new members who joined just because we were making a virtual meeting place available, never mind the high quality of the presentations and speakers.

A more consistent and forward thinking planning of recruitment advertisement saw RCTS enrolling over 350 new members, an increase of over 30% on the previous year's recruitment figure. This was the third best year for recruitment since 2001, surpassed only when free membership offers were available. Zoom activity, indeed any activity, by society branches had a magnetic pull for railway enthusiasts.

During the various lockdowns of 2021, there was an explosion in the use of Zoom web conferencing and the Strategy Group was heavily involved in ensuring that this alternative to face-to-face meetings was expanded on the widest front possible, and offered guidance, written and verbal, to branches to become proficient in hosting presentations on Zoom, and in some cases as hybrid delivery, with a physical meeting being synchronously broadcast to on-line members. This latter methodology is not for the faint-hearted, and requires additional audio-visual resources as well as a competent host and presenter!

The new and larger *Railway Observer* of 2021 gave an opportunity to introduce the new monthly feature entitled *Running Lines*, where the Strategy Group details the operational aspects of the Society, and provides a reminder to keep communications with its members grounded in print as well as electronically, to ensure our membership without access to broadband networks can be as well informed as those with high-speed Internet.

The Strategy Group is well aware of the changes in society in general towards a more instantaneous gratification, with concomitant shorter attention spans in individuals. The society does need to embrace social media platforms in greater depth and their usefulness in widening the reach of the society and attracting younger members, and the aim is to evolve with this transition. As the very early indications from the new members' questionnaires show, RCTS can still attract those of an age who can remember steam engines, but as these were last used 'in anger' over 50 years ago, we will not be able to keep a hold on actual experiences and memories for much longer.

On behalf of the society's membership, I would like to record heartfelt thanks to Paul Chancellor, Irene Rabbits, David Kelso, Alan Cooke, Steve Lacey, Ronnie McAdam, Matthew Shaw, Richard Whitehead, David Jackman, Keith Merritt and David Cross for their unstinting energy and for donating their time to your society's future. They would all join with me in thanking all members for their continuing trust in the Strategy Group and its work.

Strategy Group members are charged with the responsibility to keep your Society at the forefront of today's societal changes and maintaining RCTS as "*Britain's Leading Railway Society*". This is some challenge, and we will strive to meet it in 2022 and beyond.



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

2022 Members' Day

**Brunel Suite, The Grand Station,
Sun Street, Wolverhampton WV10 0BF**

Saturday 9th April 2022
commencing at 11.00 (*doors open 10.30*)

Programme for the Day

- 11.00** **Welcome & refreshments**, followed by
Chris Youett presenting: “**A selection
from the Ron Vincent colour archive**”.
- 12.30** **Buffet lunch** (*£7.50 – must be pre-ordered*)
- 13.15** **86th Annual General Meeting**
- 15.30** **Refreshments**, followed by
(*approx.*) **David Jackman** presenting: “**The Midlands
– as seen from the RCTS digital archive**”.
- 17.00** **Close.**

The Brunel Suite is part of the Grand Station conference facility which is housed in the former GWR Wolverhampton Low Level station and has a large, free car park for its customers. It is close to the modern-day Wolverhampton station – if arriving by train, exit the front of this station, bear left to pass behind the multi-storey car park into Cornhill, then follow this road under the railway bridge and turn left into Sun Street. The Grand Station will now be ahead on your right. Total distance approx. 300 yards.

We look forward to welcoming members and their guests to Wolverhampton!