



# Swanning Around

## A Look At What's Happening Around The Swanage Railway

Issue 104 – December 7<sup>th</sup> 2023

We wish our readers and Swanage Railway supporters a very happy Christmas and a prosperous New Year.

The Swanage Railway Christmas offering this year is The Polar Express, and as you might expect, there's some of that in this issue. The main concern for the railway management is still the finances, and there is more news later. Communication from management is much improved recently, to the point where there is a weekly issue of SITREP for the working members. These SITREPS do not necessarily translate well for the public-facing issues of Swanning Around, so we have a custom report prepared by the deputy chairman of the Swanage Railway Trust, Will Sheret.

Here's Swanage station in festive mood, with *Eddystone* poking its nose out at the end of platform 2, awaiting the 'right away' for another performance of The Polar Express.





The Polar Express has taken over the railway for the Christmas season, as you might expect, and that has included rebranding the station frontage at Swanage!

In early November, there were several runs from Swanage to Norden to confirm the point-to-point timings for the train to match the performance being provided by the production company inside the train. On 16<sup>th</sup> November, the first Polar Express train proper was run with invited guests to firm up the production as a rehearsal, with the public performances starting the next day, 17<sup>th</sup> November.

The stars of the show are ready to board the train to the North Pole

photo: Andrew P M Wright







The show starts on the platform at Swanage.

photos: Andrew P M Wright







The show continues inside the train, of course, and here we see the Conductor serenading(?) Swanage Mayor Tina Foster on the rehearsal train. Swanage Railway Company chairman Gavin Johns looks suitably amused. We wonder what the Conductor is saying or singing! You can make up your own minds and provide your own caption! Tina had earlier cut the red ribbon to mark the start of this first time venture for the railway's Christmas offering.

And Santa has shown up as well! Isn't he supposed to be at the North Pole? Perhaps he got on when the train stopped there! (That's Norden, by the way)

photos: Andrew P M Wright







The coaches in this set were looking smart after some tidying by the carriage and wagon department, (see issue 103 p4) and have been rebranded for the Polar Express, as has the tender of 34028 *Eddystone*.

Having a discussion alongside the loco are driver Les Frampton, and fitter Rob Tuck. Now Les has recently had a significant birthday. You wouldn't guess how young he is! Belated happy birthday, Les, and lots more of them!

photo: Andrew P M Wright







Setting up by the production company was a big job, assisted by our own Estates and crane departments. Here a technician is sorting out the lighting and cabling for inside the coaches, and the decorations under the platform canopy.

Several large sheds have been erected on the platform to support the production, with the Christmas tree also donated by the company. Saves the town council having to do it!

(wouldn't one of those sheds look good in my garden! - Ed.)

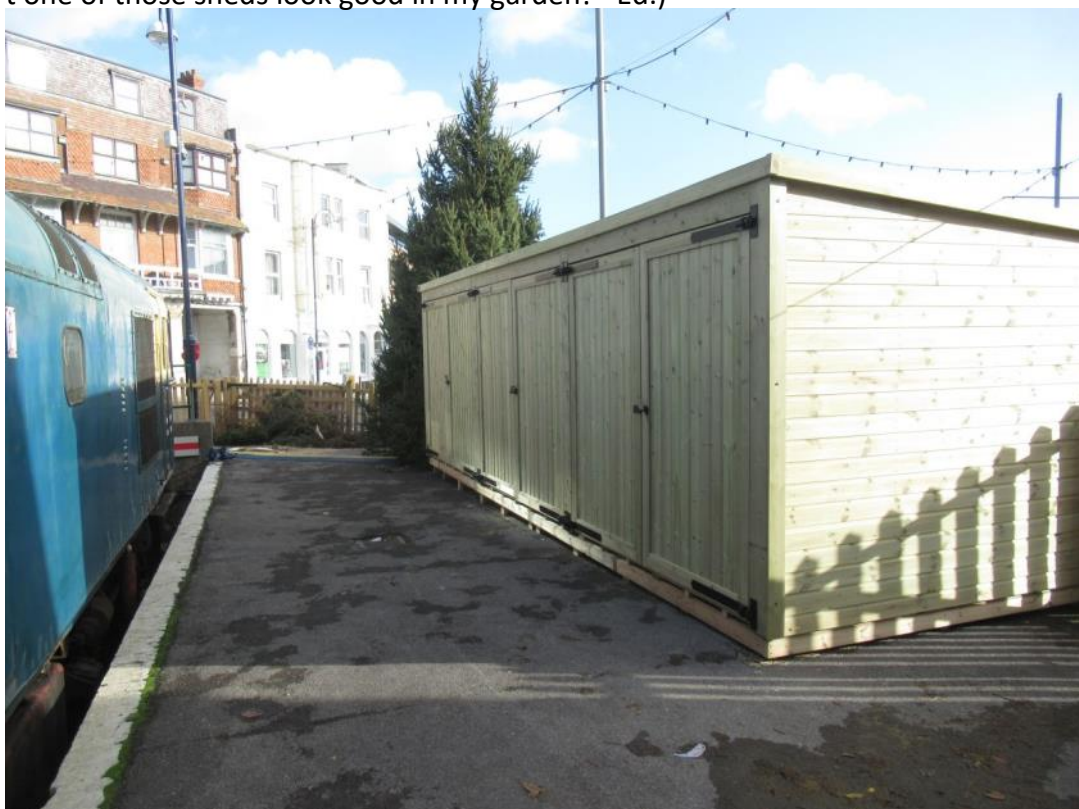






Photo: Gary Packer

The Polar Express at Corfe Castle.

A service from Swanage to the North Pole (that's Norden!) passes through on 30<sup>th</sup> November, with signalman David Wall exchanging single line tokens with secondman Ben Dolman.

Below, a service from the North Pole on 1<sup>st</sup> December with 34028 *Eddystone* leading passes with signalman Steve Jenkins exchanging tokens with the loco crew. The castle itself is illuminated in the background in support of the village Christmas festivities.





## SITREP SUMMARY – November 2023

SITREP is an internal Swanage Railway document compiled for working staff and Trust members; it is posted on HOPs (Heritage Operations Processing System), on SR Staff and distributed via the Volunteer Information email group. All working members and staff should have access to HOPS – please contact The SR HOPS Administrator Ben Dolman; [ben.dolman@swanagerailway.co.uk](mailto:ben.dolman@swanagerailway.co.uk). For SR Staff access, and to be added to the 'Volunteer Information' email group, please contact Peter Milford on [peter.milford@swanagerailway.co.uk](mailto:peter.milford@swanagerailway.co.uk)

Members of the Business Review Group, assisted by others, continue to progress plans for our Railway's recovery. As I have mentioned previously, it is essential that we assess every aspect, and follow the correct procedure the first time. **I sincerely apologise to any person who is concerned by the length of time the process is taking.**

As a reminder the fundamentals of the Business Recovery Plan will be:

- ❖ The cessation of all but essential spending. Managers must only purchase items budgeted for, and then up to £100. Orders, for budgeted items, over £100 must be authorised by a Company Director.
- ❖ Arrangements for a formal Winter Loan by the Trust to support the Company now in the hands of our solicitors and our bank (Barclays).
- ❖ Swanage Railway Fundraising Appeal.
- ❖ Improved communication
- ❖ Creation of 2024 Budget; subject to ongoing review prior to start on 01 Feb 24.
- ❖ Introduction of a comprehensive set of Key Performance Indicators, at all levels, to monitor and adjust our business.
- ❖ 2024 Fare increase.
- ❖ Confirmation of Special Events for 2024 – including a new Event Protocol.

### News from the Board meeting (Thu 23 Nov 23)

**Health & Safety.** This is always the first report; and no new occurrences were reported. There is currently a new Station Track Safety proposal, which has been well received, and this will see a change to the track safety training for some staff.

**Reporting of Crime.** Following a break in at Herston Halt, it was confirmed that Andy Haddon (Health & Safety Manager) should be kept informed of all crime and police matters.

**Financial Advisory Group (FAG).** Proposals from the recent meeting were discussed.



**Base Timetable (2024).** There have been a number of proposals for next year. The proposals are posted on HOPS. Amongst other discussions the lunchtime break has been removed and the blue timetable returns to six trains.

**Swanage Railway Data Group.** A small team led by Robert Craine has been compiling all sorts of data to assess passenger flows. The Group is now formally adopted

**Wareham Service.** An offer of assistance has been received from Stewart Palmer, who was previously a Managing Director at South West Trains. The Board agreed to support the compilation of data leading to a formal report containing options for the service in the future.

**Wessex Belle.** In consideration of the current situation, the Board agreed that the Wessex Belle stock, except the kitchen, should be sold.

**Rules & Safety Committee.** David Dow, Chair, and Celia Harding, Secretary, were welcomed to the Board meeting. A few minor changes to the Rule Book had been proposed for 2024, and an order would be placed for printing.

**Infrastructure Works.** A steady programme of infrastructure maintenance work was proposed, including some work required on Grange Road bridge. 10 track panels are due to be relaid late 2024.

**Locomotives.** Eddystone will be the mainstay of the Polar Express, at the Country End, with a 33 at London End. The U is the standby loco. Manston has been hired to the Watercress Line until May 24. The M7 locomotive was also discussed in anticipation of the Drummond Locomotive Society Annual General Meeting now planned for Sat 09 Dec 23.

### **Save Your Railway Appeal update**

The eagle eyed amongst you will have noticed a change in the appeal target for our 'Save Your Railway' appeal. We set our initial appeal target for £250,000, this figure is the amount of money required to get us through the winter into the 2024 season. Subsequently we have undertaken a holistic review of structural issues we have to face, our key priorities for 2024 being: debt free, implementing the governance reforms, and continuing with a programme of repair and maintenance of assets across the railway.

Following this, we made the decision that we need to raise an additional £200,000 to ensure our medium-term sustainability. This doesn't mean that the situation is any more acute, rather that we have reviewed the various projects we need to deliver, and amended our appeal target to suit. This isn't a decision we take lightly.

The total as of 6th December is **£43,438**. We've almost hit 10% which, considering the 'official' launch was only four weeks ago, and it is the approach to Christmas, isn't too bad.

Needless to say, I'm still plugging away to keep this going, leaflets are currently being printed for distribution with the SRM, with another 2000 of them due to be spread far and wide. Other items in the pipeline too.

If you haven't already, please consider donating to our Save Your Railway Appeal, our new 'Enthuse' donations page makes this easier than ever before. I would also like to draw your attention to the monthly donation option, this will give the Swanage Railway regular and predictable income into the future. If you have already donated, thank you, please help us further by spreading the word to friends, family and anyone who loves the Swanage Railway.

(you can donate to the railway's current appeal [HERE](#) )

## Sygnets Update—from Ben Ford

You could call this an update, but this is also our first piece in SITREP, so for anyone who isn't already aware of the group this is an introduction too. A brief history: Established in 1997, we are the Swanage Railway Trust's Youth Group. If you combine Swanage Youth Group with the name of a baby Swan, a Cygnet, you then have the Sygnets, and thus our name was born. Accepting youths from age 13, we accept and support them all the way through to when they can join the 'big railway'. We've somehow managed to keep the group going for over 25 years, an achievement that not all heritage railways can boast. We're one of the SR's hidden gems and we're proud to call Swanage home.

We initially started out rather small, with barely a handful of youths helping with everyday tasks around the railway. Eventually we started to grow, gaining a base in deepest darkest Norden, specifically Woodpecker siding in the railways only 'Ironclad' coach. Grow we did, as we soon outgrew our old base and, with a few different 'homes' over the years, are now happily established at Norden Neck, with our own dedicated platform (you may have seen it at Roads to Rail!) and living out of a very spacious Southern Bogie Van 'B', controversially painted in BR Rail Blue (not green!)

We currently number a massive 35 youths in the group, something we never dreamed of in the 90's, and we still have a waiting list of over 20, a number that only ever grows. The group is supported and lead by a dedicated team of 12 with assistance from various departments in running our activities. Typically we meet once a month, though we do hope to expand on this with enough leaders, and you can find us getting stuck in nearly everywhere we can, even at other railways! Our most recent visit being the Churnet Valley for a weekend field trip to see how other railways function.

Now, time for the update. Your author, Ben Ford, Head of Sygnets, Trustee and too many other titles, now leading the Trust's fundraising efforts, has handed the Sygnet Leadership baton over to the widely known 'Grumpy Guard' Aidan Wright. He in turn is supported in his new role as Head by Anthony Bossom as deputy, as well as leaders Jo Guess, Lucy Clarke, and of course myself. I hope I can count on SITREP's readers to show every courtesy and support to the new Sygnet Leadership as you did with me.

That's not all! Every January, during the railways winter shutdown, the Sygnets challenge themselves to a 'sponsored' line walk between Furzebrook and Harmans Cross, a distance of roughly 5 miles over rather unfriendly terrain and, being January, some rather unpleasant weather. Usually this is done to raise funds for the group but, with our railway struggling currently, the Sygnets have opted to donate all proceeds to the 'Save Your Railway' appeal. With no railway there is no Sygnets after all.

So, can you help?

We're always on the lookout for dedicated people to help out with the group and become a leader. The more leaders we have, the more the group can do, and of course the more youths we can invite to help secure the railways future! The primary benefits are tea, coffee, and donuts, but also the reward of seeing our youths grow up and join the railway proper. It still amazes me that members who were once shorter than me are now teaching me how to fire an engine!

If you wish to join, please email [lucy.clarke@swanagerailway.co.uk](mailto:lucy.clarke@swanagerailway.co.uk)

If you wish to sponsor the group's January walk, you can do so here via Enthuse: <https://swanagerailwaytrust.enthuse.com/sygnets>

All proceeds will go to the 'Save Your Railway' appeal, more info here: <https://www.swanagerailway.co.uk/save-your-railway>





These pictures of Sygnets groups supplied by Ben Ford are almost historical. For those readers familiar with Swanage Railway staff, see how many of the Sygnets you can identify, and how many have progressed in the railway as adults. We think most of them! Ben Ford himself is looking rather young here, and now he's a Trustee/Director!







Down in the Swanage engine shed, the recent incumbent the T9 no. 30120 has been bundled out in favour of the recently restored T3 no. 563. Now you may remember that the T3 was exhibiting some lacklustre performance after its return to service on the railway such that a maximum three-coach load was deemed appropriate for the T3 gala in October. An inappropriate blastpipe cap was seen as the main issue, and this has now been replaced by a more suitable item, being pointed out by fitter Ethan Waller (did you spot him in a previous picture?). The result, we are told, is a different engine, as proven with a test load of two non-powering diesels hanging on behind the tender.

A piston and valve exam should clear up any other questions, and we will see how good it is in the January 2024 Winter Warm Up weekend, 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> January 2024. Be there!

Meanwhile, 30120 has been unceremoniously dumped in this picture, but has since been reunited with its chimney and dome. The 563 group, we understand, is in negotiations for the future overhaul of this fine locomotive.





Photo: Gary Packer



In issue 103, 34070 *Manston* had just returned from a visit to the Bluebell Railway's Giants of Steam gala at the end of October, and on 28<sup>th</sup> November, *Manston* is back on its travels, this time to the Mid-Hants Railway. That's double good, as it helps the Swanage Railway's finances and helps the Mid-Hants' Steam Illuminations train as a substitute for a loco with an unwanted boiler issue.

Above, *Manston* is towed out of Swanage on 28<sup>th</sup> November to be loaded for its road trip to Alresford, while below, it is seen at Ropley on the Watercress Line's Steam Illuminations train on 2<sup>nd</sup> December.



Photo: screen grab from SatNavDan's YouTube video

For a few years now, the station team at Corfe Castle has treated itself to a Christmas period lunch at the Isle of Purbeck Golf Club. Find another place for your lunch with a better view than that! Poole Harbour when it's not raining!



While you're there, dish out some awards, with certificates of appreciation for the maintenance team.

In the picture below we have, left to right, Kevin Callaghan, Keith Fullbrook, David Scott, Ian Snell, Justin Ward, Steve Todd, Paul O'Brien, Geoff Rolfe and Norman Reid. Not present in the picture Alan Keys and Sarah Blackwell.

Other station team members are also available!





With the carriage and wagon team always busy on one of our carriages in the Swanage Goods Shed, it's difficult to see the state of the track underneath, except when the carriages are removed. On one such day, someone decided it would be a good idea to clear out all the rubbish and dirt accumulated on the track, and 4TC group member Kevin Hare was duly press-ganged to assist and has submitted these pictures for us all to appreciate what it all looks like after the detritus has been removed.

It's a good storage location for steel tubing!

Amongst the stuff found was someone's fine jumper. Just needs a wash and should be good for many more years!

Find Kevin to claim it!

Photos: Kevin Hare







Photo: Bob Bunyar

Carriages in and out.

On 13<sup>th</sup> November, Car 14 (see issue 103) was sent on its way to winter storage in Margate, on the same lorry that brought the second TC carriage 76302 from Bellingham in Northumberland (see also issue 100 p27 and 101 p5). 76302 is seen at Harmans Cross sandwiched between the two class 33s. Both diesels were used to speed up the shunts without the faffing around of having to run round and shunt with only one loco. This is made particularly difficult with a carriage that has no working brake and different couplings at each end!

On 30<sup>th</sup> November, Southern Railway Bulleid design carriage no. 4366 was sent on its way for structural refurbishment at Ramparts Engineering at Barrow Hill near Chesterfield. The protective wrapping was not for Christmas, but was suggested that it might be to stop bits falling off on the way!

Here, 4366 is leaving its storage location, with heritage carriage group leader Pete Short there to see it on its way. Check out their Facebook page [HERE](#) for more details.



Photo: heritage carriage group





Have you noticed a change of name for the Volunteer Recruitment and Retention Officer on the last page of the publication? No?

Well, the new incumbent is Lisa Gravett, and here she is so that you will recognise her about the railway. If you have the slightest interest in volunteering, if only to see what volunteering opportunities are available, just check her contact details and get in touch! There's no commitment, but every new volunteer will be welcomed.

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On 7<sup>th</sup> November, the class 121 'Bubblecar' DMU was pressed into service as transport for the bridge inspection personnel. Thankfully no serious issues uncovered, save for the walkway on Grange Road bridge being deemed unsafe, and that the inspection not fully completed. This issue is being attended to by the Permanent Way team, and hopefully will not commit the railway to any further unexpected expense.



The sharp-eyed amongst you may have noticed that the Polar Express locos were carrying wreaths. Not just for Polar Express and Christmas, but also for remembering our friend and colleague Paul McDonald, who passed away recently. His funeral on 25<sup>th</sup> November was attended by several hundred, such was the high regard in which he was held.

Swanning Around does not do obituaries, but Paul's passing could not be ignored, such was the effect that he has had on the Swanage Railway during his extensive service on the footplate and as a long-serving operations manager.

Just stand near the turntable at Swanage, and look in any direction. Paul was responsible for that, and that, and that over there, and he built that, and that as well, etc..

He is greatly missed. Rest in peace, friend.

photo: Andrew P M Wright





As usual, volunteers are required in all departments, so,

To use your existing skills or to learn new ones, contact us about being a Swanage Railway volunteer by either sending an email to [iwanttovolunteer@swanagerailway.co.uk](mailto:iwanttovolunteer@swanagerailway.co.uk) or by calling 01929 475212 to contact Lisa Gravett, our Volunteer Recruitment and Retention Officer.

-----ooOoo-----

If you are not a member of the Swanage Railway, don't be put off! Contact us and volunteer (or at least make an enquiry)! You know you want to! You will be most welcome!

-----ooOoo-----

Compiled and edited by John Denison

Email to [swanning.around@swanagerailway.co.uk](mailto:swanning.around@swanagerailway.co.uk)

Swanning Around also appears on line at:

<http://www.srstaff.co.uk/swanningaround> (not password protected)

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