

# *Swanning Around*

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

Issue 60 – March 24<sup>th</sup> 2020

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### **Covid-19, Coronavirus**

Hasn't stopped this issue of Swanning Around, but has stopped almost everything else!

With the situation changing daily, it was difficult to advise what the situation was for the Swanage Railway. Since we had Boris's TV address on Monday evening, things are much clearer. By the time you read this, it may have changed again!

Everything including the railway is closed! But for how long? The Swanage Railway is closed until further notice.

Of course, it's never as simple as that, as the railway continues to exist, and no matter what the Government may offer in compensation, if anything, there are still costs to cover, but without any income from fares or other commercial activities to pay for them.

At Swanning Around, we have been receiving some official information to pass on to readers, but, as you will realise, much of it has been overtaken by events.

Initially, all train services up to 23<sup>rd</sup> March were cancelled, followed by the Diesel Gala scheduled for late April. Then all services stopped up to 1<sup>st</sup> May, when the situation would be reviewed again. And so on.

Best to publish the note from the Swanage Railway Company chairman, Liz Sellen, received by Swanning Around on 22<sup>nd</sup> March, a day before Boris's address. Some parts are affected by the new restrictions, but may still have some currency if the Government reviews its restrictions in three weeks' time.

Otherwise, you can see they've been busy ensuring that when restrictions are lifted, the railway will be ready to go again.

From Liz Sellen, 22<sup>nd</sup> March.

*The past 10 days have been unprecedented in our Railway's history for fast moving and far reaching outside influences needing to be implemented here. Government instructions, NHS Guidelines, World Health Organisation updates have been being viewed by many daily so fast is the Covid-19 pandemic the world finds itself in.*

*The Swanage Railway (Company and Trust) have responded to this by setting up a Response team consisting of Liz Sellen, Jon Bridgland and David Rawsthorn who drawing on their own experience and advice from professional advisers have been developing the Railways response to what is a dynamic and fluid situation. An initial posting was made on SRStaff on 13<sup>th</sup> March 2020 (Friday).*

*Since then there have been substantial developments in both the pandemic and our Government's Guidelines. Coupled with our having observed volunteers being unable to make themselves available as a result also. So much so that only days later with the decision (again posted srstaff) to cancel 4 days of trading 20<sup>th</sup> 21<sup>st</sup> 22<sup>nd</sup> & 23<sup>rd</sup> March due to the fast changing circumstances preventing crews from being available to run these.*

*On Thursday 19<sup>th</sup> March the Company Board of Directors took the difficult decision to suspend with immediate effect the start of our main operating season until 1<sup>st</sup> May 2020 at the earliest. Also to close catering and retail outlets and Herston Works, to suspend recruitment and to seek to avoid group meetings whilst exploring the practicalities of holding 'on line' meetings and distance training. The intention is to keep the Railway in a state of 'readiness to go'. Directors responsible for departments are now liaising with managers to discuss the specific actions required in their areas in maintaining this. The practicalities of working from home also being pursued.*

*Through all of this the welfare of everyone paid and voluntary is of paramount importance and all have been advised to follow Government and NHS /WHO guidelines. Self-distancing being among those advices we are now also taking advice on all the implications of that and of the announcements of assistance financial and otherwise issued by the Prime Minister and The Chancellor in recent days. In view of the forthcoming extensive loss of revenue, our first priority has to be to ensure the survival of the Railway and we are actively engaging with our suppliers as well the various Government aid packages which have been announced.*

*Some areas of the railway may be able to re open and operate in restricted conditions but at the time of preparing this response for Swanning Around we are not able to say where and by whom.*

*Volunteers are urged to liaise with their line managers but primarily to conform with Government Guidelines and not put themselves at risk by attending the Railway.*

*We will all be working together in coming days, weeks and months to seek to achieve our "ready to go" date and once more all be able to undertake the roles we love on the railway.*

*Swanning Around, srstaff.co.uk and other Railway sites and publications will be kept updated as can be on what's happening*

*We here and the country find itself in uncharted waters. We need all to pull together and support not only the Railway but each other too. Be assured of the Railways commitment to meeting this challenge. Thank you for your continued support.*

To keep up to date with the situation, updates will be available on the usual Swanage Railway information outlets:

Web Site: <https://swanagerailway.co.uk/>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/swanagerailway>

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/SwanRailway>

As already mentioned, the Swanage Railway is going to feel the pinch with loss of revenue from no commercial activity for some time, so please consider making a donation to the railway to ensure that we are fit to run again when the crisis is over. See the appeal below, from the Facebook page.



Swanage Railway like nearly all heritage railways relies on a mix of fares and other commercial income, donations, legacies and grants to pay its way. Sadly the decision to suspend our commercial operations until 1 May at the earliest (*much later now –Ed.*) will place a huge strain our finances. We are therefore stepping up our fund raising efforts and ask our supporters, friends and well wishers to consider making donations to the Swanage Railway Trust to protect the future of the railway we love and cherish.

<https://www.swanagerailwaytrust.org/giving>

We thank you in advance for your support.

So what's happening with the Wareham trial service? We're scheduled to do 90 days of running to Wareham this year, which was due to start on 5<sup>th</sup> May, but again, a certain virus is affecting plans.

Swanage Railway Company director responsible for the Wareham project, Mark Woolley, wrote to Swanning Around on 22<sup>nd</sup> March:

*Further to my recent update to you (sent only 7 days ago!) the start of the 90 day Wareham service has inevitably had to be delayed. We need to notify our external stakeholders and will issue a further update to staff and members ASAP. All the work we have done in recent months will not be wasted and should be 'oven ready' for us to pick up again when the time is right.*

Needless to say, in light of yesterday's Government announcement, that delay cannot be quantified just yet!

Up until last week, training and testing had been taking place.

On 27<sup>th</sup> February, for its first run out, the three-car class 117 unit is coupled to the single car class 121 unit, seen here passing the oil sidings at Furzebrook on a training/testing run.



Picture: Andrew P M Wright



Picture: Andrew P M Wright

A week later, on 6<sup>th</sup> March, the 117 unit is on its own, passing through the SSSI between Creech Bottom and Furzebrook.

Another week later, and this foreshortening view of the 117 unit approaching Holme Lane bridge shows the final 5/8 mile between the bridge and the Swanage Railway/ Network Rail boundary at bridge 2, where the circular 20 sign is in the distance. The two light-coloured patches between the rails in the distance are bridges 3 and 4, across the River Frome. Bridge 4 is our normal limit of operations, in front of Network Rail's yellow signal.

In the cab, Acting Operations Manager Paul McDonald is driving, while diesel fitter Andy Garrett occupies the other side. And before you ask, yes, the marker lights needed fixing! Andy has been kept busy with a few other snagging items brought to view by the testing runs.

Tidmore user-worked crossing is at the bottom of the 1 in 78 gradient that the 117 is climbing in the foreground. Pay attention! You'll need that info for later!



Picture: Andrew P M Wright

Processing of Office of Rail and Road (ORR) and Network Rail paperwork is in progress. On 3<sup>rd</sup> March the ORR published their “Notice of proposal to grant licences “, prior to granting a licence to operate on the main line to Wareham after consultations. The ORR had already confirmed on 5<sup>th</sup> February that they have no objection to the 117 and 121 units being used on the main line between Worgret Junction and Wareham, and we are presently working with Network Rail to include these in the NR sectional appendix.

Progress is such that, when virus-related restrictions are lifted we should be “oven ready” (to quote Mark Woolley!) to resume, subject to timetabling, financial, and other issues that may appear. Nothing is certain. The world may not return to the previous normality! Swanning Around will endeavour to keep you informed.

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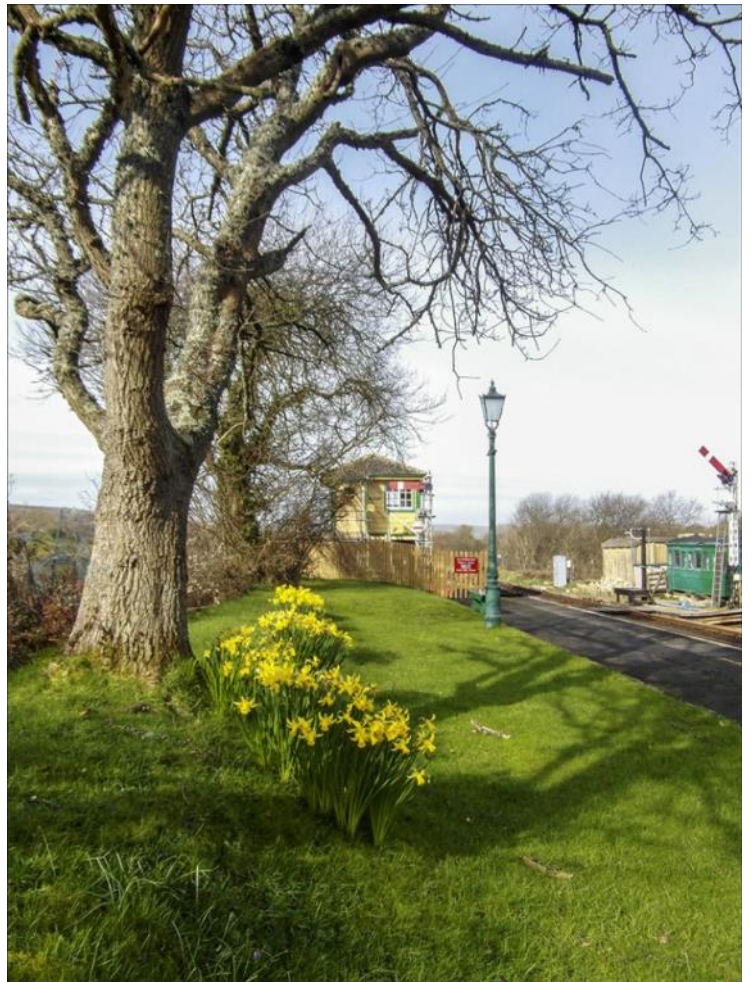
Work on the carriage shed at Herston has also been suspended.

Here’s the site on 20<sup>th</sup> March, with most of the foundations completed.



No trains, but Harmans Cross station was ready and waiting and full of the joys of spring on 16<sup>th</sup> March. Looks like it will have to wait a little (or a lot?) longer!

Picture from Harmans Cross station volunteer Graham Jakes



Another volunteer for the Estates department! On 18<sup>th</sup> March, Estates manager Pat Cattle is showing John Watt around at Norden.

Lots more volunteers required! You know where to apply!

As you saw in the last issue of SA, our Permanent Way team finished the track re-laying exercise around Dickers crossing, but they still had to clear up the mess they made, and also handle the muck away from the carriage shed job.

Below, excess material is being used to widen the embankment at Tidmore crossing on 4<sup>th</sup> March. The embankments in this area are quite narrow, and anything to improve stability is a plus action in these times of very dry summer followed by very wet winter, which has caused many slippages on railway embankments elsewhere around the country.

Richard Fry is using Little Sis to empty the Super Turbotts of their loads of spoil.

Picture: Martin Smith



And on 18<sup>th</sup> March, the P'Way team is finishing off at Dickers by dropping ballast on the shoulders from the Dogfish hoppers.

Picture: Paul Simons



The crane gang were in action at Norden on 6<sup>th</sup> March.

Crane FBC1 is suffering from some metal worm, and John Wight and Keith Bowers are in amongst the winding gear removing rusted metalwork from the framework, seen below with Brian Sorrell.





Resident class 33 'Crompton' D6515 was out on the main line on 8<sup>th</sup> March with a Branch Line Society "Devonian Crompton" charter to Coleford. Seen above at Crediton, and below at Cowley Bridge Junction, Exeter.

Picture above by Lewis Allin, below by Ben Broomfield, via the Swanage Railway Unofficial web site.



Just had a suggestion from Harmans Cross Stationmaster Peter Foster that, to fill in for a lack of trains to play with, we could have a railway-orientated quiz. May be in the next issue.

But what for a prize?



(Not a chance! You'll have to mug me for it! - Ed.)

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

If you fancy volunteering for something, or need more info about a project, department, or anything else on the railway, then contact **Volunteer Liaison Officer Mike Whitwam** on

[iwanttovolunteer@swanagerailway.co.uk](mailto:iwanttovolunteer@swanagerailway.co.uk)

or the volunteer contact phone number

**01929-475212**, where you can leave a message.

You will get a prompt response.

**NOTE: All new volunteers MUST go through Mike Whitwam for induction and registration before they can start on the railway.**

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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!

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Compiled and edited by John Denison

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Swanning Around also appears on line at:

<http://www.srstaff.co.uk/swanningaround>

and

<http://swanagerailway.co.uk/volunteers-diary>