

Somerset Levels and Moors Shed January 2020 newsletter

Welcome to the January 2020 members newsletter. Apologies for not issuing a December newsletter, things have become somewhat unstable of late and my attendance at sessions has been sporadic.

Due to a number of personal issues this will be my final newsletter. I will be happy to help whoever decides to take this on.

We are also battling a shortage of people to take things on in the shed and help with the running. One area is in shed supervisors (i.e: people to oversee the running of sessions). This is one reason the shed has had to close on Fridays for the time being. There is the prospect that the Thursday session will also have to be suspended for a period of time.

Colin, in his address at the last AGM mentioned that there was a need for Bridgwater people to make the shed their own. That need remains as important as it was last April.

Besides session supervisors, there are a number of other roles in the shed that need to be filled at committee level and in more general help:

Secretary
Treasurer

Session supervisors.
Newsletter Editor/Facebook Moderator

Notes from the Shed visit to the West Somerset Railway, October 2019.

Mike Brown, one of those who attending, has emailed some notes from our visit on the 28th of October 2019

A small group of shedders visited the Railway at Bishops Lydeard near Taunton . It was well worth the visit. The first stop was the WSR maintenance Shed where new products are made and others repaired. We met up with a group of volunteers who maintain the structure of the railway (at all stations) but not the engines.

We were allowed access to most areas including the signal box and the footplate of the Bishops Lydeard to Minehead train just before it departed. We were able to discuss how we might be able to help each other. These talks are on going but there are projects in which where we are able to assist them.



Bert and Dave have been very busy over the Autumn with a number of commissioned projects. This staircase is just one example of their work, seen during November, just before completion.

Notes from Ted Cubbitt – on Railways in Bridgwater

Ted emailed me this back in September and I've been waiting for an opportunity to make good use of his article, which is interesting.

The first railway in Bridgwater was the Bristol and Exeter, which opened from Bristol on 30th June 1841 and was extended to Taunton on 1st July 1842. The railway station was designed by Isambard Kingdom Brunel and with minor alterations is the station you see today.

John Browne was a Director and shareholder of the Bristol and Exeter (B&E) Railway, elected Deputy Chairman in 1847 he lived with his wife Mary Ann and four children at Elm Wood House, Bridgwater. The house has long since gone and the site is now Robert Blake Science College. The family were active members of the Unitarian Chapel in Bridgwater.

He died in 1872. John Browne owned a number of brick and tile works in the town, including Old Taunton Road, now the site of Manley Gardens and what is now East Quay, this one was rail connected. The railway was built to Brunel's broad gauge (7ft between the rails).

It was converted to standard gauge (4ft 8ins between the rails) in 1892.

The B&E decided to build a branch line from the station to the docks on the other side of the River Parrett.

Bridgwater Corporation objected to river navigation being blocked, so a telescopic bridge was designed, with the middle section sliding to open to allow boats to go upriver. This was the Black Bridge you see

today, now a foot path, it was last opened in 1953.

The branch was opened March 1871 and closed by British Rail in April 1967. After British Railways closed the docks branch in 1967, the part of the branch in the station goods yard was retained and converted to a transfer station for nuclear flasks from Hinckley Point for onward rail journey to Sellafield in Cumbria, it is still in use today.

The Bristol and Exeter Railway established its carriage repair works south of the station, on what is now Colley Lane Industrial Estate. Carriage repairs stopped in 1934, when the works was taken over by the War Department. After the war it was used to repair tarpaulin covers for wagons. There were extensive sidings into the works and to private company's as well. This gradually faded away and by 2000 the railway sidings were closed and removed.

Further information, pictures and maps can be found in the book Bristol to Taunton, published by the Middleton Press. The Bristol and Exeter was taken over by the Great Western Railway in 1876, which was nationalised in 1948, becoming part of British Railways.

The Somerset and Dorset Joint Railway had a branch line running from Evercreech Junction to Burnham-on-Sea. They had long held ambitions to connect to Bridgwater. After much wrangling an Act of Parliament to build the Bridgwater Railway from Edington Junction to Bridgwater was obtained. This opened on 17th July 1890, it terminated at a new station called Bridgwater North, complete with engine shed and goods yard.

This was on the site now occupied by Sainsbury's Supermarket. Unfortunately this was not the success hoped for and the line was closed on 1st October 1954.

Further details and pictures can be found in the excellent book The Bridgwater Railway, published by The Oakwood Press.

Ted Cubitt.

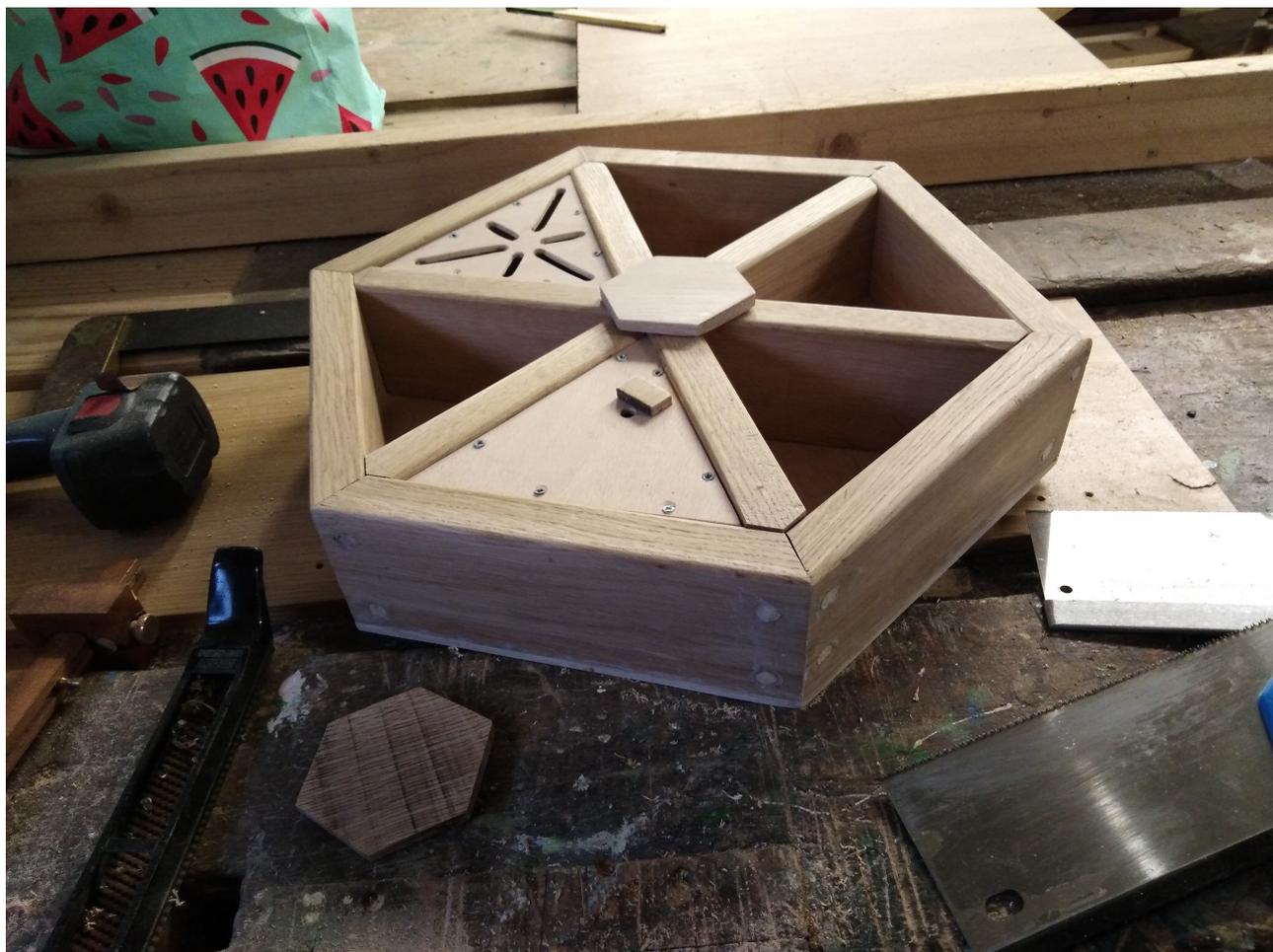
Editor's notes – Robin Atthill's 1967 book 'Somerset & Dorset Railway' published by David & Charles is another excellent source of reference on the history of the S&D. The book is long out of print but secondhand copies can be found.



There are also a number of preserved railways which use parts of the S&D. The Somerset & Dorset Railway Heritage Trust is based at Midsomer Norton Station, the Shillingstone Railway Project in North Dorset is based at the station and the Gartell Light Railway just outside Templecombe owns just under a mile of the original trackbed and narrow gauge locomotives run on selected open days.

The photo above shows one of the two Gartell Steam locomotives No 9 'Jean' on the original S&D trackbed – towards Bournemouth. Jean was completed by the railway themselves and it entered service during 2009. Most of the GLR locomotives are diesel powered. Carriages are also handbuilt and old bus seats are fitted inside them.

The photo was taken in June 2013 on a particularly sunny day. Not that there is much of that this time of the year.



Another Autumn project which has come to a close is the construction of a number of bug hotels for a housing association. Having completed these, Colin is now making a few more for his garden.

New Shed Opening Hours from 2nd January 2020: Tuesday and Thursday 10.00-1500.

Slams Facebook <https://tinyurl.com/ycx8vgvh> website <https://www.slamshed.org/>

Material is always welcome for the newsletter –
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