



Ecclesbourne Express

*Newsletter of the Ecclesbourne Valley
Railway Association*

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WINTER 2024



The Wirksworth to Duffield Line

Ecclesbourne Valley Railway Association
(Company No.5257082 Limited by Guarantee Charity No. 1106810)

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The Spring Edition (Issue 94) will be published in April 2024. We welcome contributions by post/text/email to the editors please:

The **DEADLINE DATE** for inclusion will be: **15th March 2024**

NB A REMINDER WILL BE SENT 7 DAYS PRIOR TO THE ABOVE DATE.

PLEASE REPLY TO: *editorsEE@talktalk.net*

We cannot emphasise enough the importance of the deadline date!

Front Cover: Loco 78018 performs Santa Duties under glowing skies.

photo © WyvernRail

Back Cover: The Duke approaches Wirksworth Station at the New Year Steam Gala

photo © Trish Birks

Letter from the editors

So, it is 2024 already! The start of a New Year and hopefully a new season of entertaining and pleasing the public.

You may know that we have suffered another major landslip near Duffield tunnel, in the same place as the previous one, but more serious this time. The driveway of the property at the top of the embankment has slipped about a quarter of the way down the bank, which has stopped us from running to Duffield once more.

There is hope on the horizon but unfortunately, whatever course of action is taken, it will not be a quick (or cheap) fix!

We have had the Standard 2 78018 here for a while now and she has been working the Christmas trains very successfully, while 80080 had some much needed TLC. The Duke is now fit to steam and all 3 were active at the New Year Gala on 31st December and 1st January.

The Diesel fleet continues to flourish and Eric D9537 has been hard at work along with 73001 on the top and tailed Christmas trains.

The new format of our Christmas entertainment "Santa's Enchanted Journey" has been very popular with our visitors.

The EVRA Museum and shop have been swelling the coffers so a big thank you to the teams who work their magic in there.

At long last The Duke has made an appearance and proved to be a useful attraction at the New Year Gala, and even managed a solo round trip when the D14 failed to start on the 31st December.

Cathryn was spotted at Matlock in December which means that all the locos based at The EVR have now been restored and have been running again.

HAPPY NEW YEAR TO ONE AND ALL

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We are sure that all of the members would like to wish Mike Craft a speedy recovery from a broken leg, sustained recently.

He is progressing well, but it will be some time before he is fully mobile again.

Best wishes, Mike.

As always, please check on the website: e-v-r.com for up-to-date information regarding services, times and facilities before travelling to Ecclesbourne Valley Railway.

Thank you

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NEWS FROM THE TRUSTEES

Wirksworth Station Building

The late good tidings are that, following the transfer of land from Network Rail to WyvernRail plc as recorded by the Land Registry, a lease can now be agreed between the PLC and the Association. This initially, will relate to the site of the Station Building but could include other sites for Association projects on the railway, to comply with Charity Commission requirements. Such a lease will enable the Association to apply for grant aid, which will be necessary for the completion of the Station Building i.e. the café and Booking Hall. At a recent Trustees meeting it was agreed unanimously that the completion of the Station Building was the top priority project for its benefits for the railway and the Association. Therefore, in 2024 we will be pressing forward with publicity, grant applications and general fund raising to see the project finished as soon as possible.

18th Wirksworth Model Railway Exhibition September 30th & 1st October 2023

With a gap for the organisers to draw breath after the Large Scale Exhibition in July, the 18th Exhibition proved popular with a good number of layouts in different gauges and a variety of traders present. Unfortunately, a rail strike on the Saturday impacted numbers both on the EVR and at the exhibition. However, the feedback was good, including favourable comments about the regular return bus service between the station and the Memorial Hall. The Association benefitted from this fund raising event and the railway benefitted from it too.

We are grateful to Malc and Brett Grubey of Malcs Models of Ilkeston for all their help with the show and to all the volunteers who help with setting up, manning the entrances etc.

ASH PIT, WIRKSWORTH YARD

By the time that you have received this Express, a new 75 foot ash pit will have been completed. This will allow two large steam engines to use the pit at the same time. The existing small ash pit which was built over 10 years ago is inadequate for large engines and does not comply with revised Health and Safety regulations.

The EVRA trustees decided to build this pit adjacent to the incline line, south of the proposed extension to the Maintenance Shed.



Left: maintenance pit waiting for the steps to be cast.



Above: Joe Halford-Marsden in the MH5.

photos © John Stokes

more follows... →

TRACK WORK

We welcome Graham Bilbie as the new P-way co-ordinator. As in previous years, at their November meeting, the Trustees also agreed to buy 400 sleepers for the necessary work to the track in early 2024.

AGM

The AGM was held on 25th November 2023 and Ben Field, Mike Craft and Pat Craft were re-elected as Trustees.

GDPR

In the autumn, June Cooke, who has kept an eye on developments relevant to this important issue and has kept the Trustees informed of relevant changes, case law etc, decided to step down. At the November Trustees meeting, Eric Hills agreed to take this role on. We are very grateful to June for all the work she has done over the years with GDPR and with the ongoing work on Gift Aid and to Eric for taking this on.

SALES MATTERS

Pat Craft

As I write this we are half-way through the Santa season, which is going well. The second-hand half-price book sale during the Model Railway Exhibition was a great attraction and produced a good income and provided much needed spaces on the shelves! We have increased the number of reduced second-hand books and reduced prices on many others to reflect the changes in prices advertised on-line. The specialist section with rare/sought after books has expanded and has proved popular with visitors. If you are interested in transport books keep an eye on the EVRA website (or via the E-V-R website where we are hoping easier access to the Association website and especially the shop will allow us to advertise books etc. more prominently – the number of steps to do this at present are off-putting)

In September, on the day before the Exhibition, the limited edition N gauge wagons (Derbyshire Stone Ltd) arrived and we were able to sell quite a few at the Exhibition and at the shop over the weekend. We have also had sales through the EVRA website for those of you who live some distance away or cannot visit the railway. We hope that early in 2024 the OO gauge Derbyshire Stone Ltd wagons will be delivered. They will come at a time when we have almost sold out of the last limited edition OO gauge (Hazelwood) wagons.

Once again, we have received a large number of donations of many types and have largely kept up with dealing with them to keep the shelves fresh. We are grateful to all who help in this way donating books (both non-fiction and fiction), railway items from wagon plates, luggage labels, prints, photographs, slides, timetables, posters etc.

In the closed season early in 2024, several of the shop volunteers will be meeting regularly to re-organise sections of the shop – so come and visit us if you are able to at half term or in the Spring.

more follows... →

PRIZE DRAW

A big thank you to all those who have returned the counterfoils and money and to the shop volunteers who have asked customers to help in this way too. We have been putting donation envelopes with books of draw tickets on the trains and that has brought in quite a few more as well some significant donations for the Station Building Appeal. It has also been raising awareness of the project. The results of the Draw, held on 17th December at the Station are below. The results will be published on the website and in the Mess Room.

No.	Prize	Value	Ticket	No.	Prize	Value	Ticket
1	£500	£500	30779	10	Delving along the Derwent	£18	29969
2	£200	£200	30013	11	Delving along the Derwent	£18	24091
3	High St vouchers	£100	33073	12	Swift Hazelwood OO gauge wagon	£15	28297
4	£50	£50	34130	13	Swift Hazelwood OO gauge wagon	£15	33048
5	Steam footplate ride	£100	33523	14	Swift Hazelwood OO gauge wagon	£15	29957
6	The Patriots 2 vols	£38	32287	15	Preserved steam in Derbyshire	£15	34476
7	2 bottles Wine	£25	33617	16	Midland Retrospective	£14	33130
8	Goodmans toaster	£22	31938	17	Reed diffuser/ Candle	£7	32931
9	3 bottles wine	£22	25192	18	Quality Street	£4	33942

GDPR RAISES ITS HEAD AGAIN.

Editors

A few weeks ago, it was suggested that we may have breached the GDP regulations. The details are now irrelevant but we had to pursue the matter.

EVRA investigated the situation and thankfully the Information Commissioner's Office advised us that no breach had been committed.

The only advice that they suggested was that we should, in future, request permission of contributors to use their name and any personal data that they may supply prior to publication.

This is to ensure we have given consent rather than assumed consent, although we could reason that legitimate use was involved here.

We always worked on the principle that if someone submits an article with their name and maybe email address or phone number in it, then they are effectively giving permission to use that information, but now we are required to get specific consent.

For this reason, if you submit an article by email or real mail, or even just hand it to us, please add a note to say that you grant permission for any included personal details to be used. (Name, address, email, telephone or any other personal data.). Just another hoop for us all to jump through...

PWAY REPORT FOR DECEMBER 2023

Graham Clark

Work this Autumn, has seen the completion of the large re-sleeping project around Postern Lodge farm. Some 400 have now been changed. This area needs the ballast topping up and some tamping before we can lift the TSR. Tamping awaits the return to service of the MH5 and tamping head and the training of more operators.

Work continues with fishplate lubrication. We are now within 1 ½ miles of Duffield which should be complete by the time you read this.

Planning for the winter work is well underway, the first task being to replace the bent half set of switches in Duffield loop. This was scheduled for early December but awaits the repairs to the Komatsu or MH5 to be able to do it.

Our new leader, Infrastructure Manager Graham Bilbie has just joined us, having recently retired from Network Rail. He has worked on pway for his entire career and even looked after our line for a time. We welcome him to Wirksworth and look forward to working with him in future.

As the New Year starts, the work of the pway team really builds up as we have possession of the line until the start of the season. We have lots of work lined up, so if you fancy some outdoors exercise with a great bunch of people, please come and join us.

We meet Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays, contact me for details (grahamwclarkuk@gmail.com).

IVATT DIESELRECREATION SOCIETY

Andrew Hoseasons

Here's a quick summary of progress:

In the summer, we had a visit from Martin Ivatt, a close relative of Mr H G Ivatt who designed locomotives for the LMS including diesel prototype 10000. The relationship is 3rd cousin, twice removed. Martin was invited to meet the volunteers and was taken to examine the loco chassis which is stored upside down on a Sturgeon wagon so that the under side can be safely accessed. The railway invited him on a return trip along the railway in the cab of 80080. [photo of Martin with Leigh at Wirksworth – IDRS]

Work has continued at Centenary Works, with the electrical cubicles from 56104 and 58022 both being stripped. That of the 58 will be the frame used in 10000 as it fits within the body shape. We have been identifying all wires against the diagram, labelling them before removal so that the frame can be painted fully.

The traction motor in 'least good' condition, has been stripped for examination. This will help us to better estimate costs involved to refurbish three motors. The next step is to fully dry the motor out and check electrical connectivity within it.

more follows →



Top L: Stripping the drive

Above L: The motor armature

Top R: Martin Ivatt in the cab of 80080

Side R: Martin and Leigh on Platform 2

Pictures supplied by the society.

BAGNALL 2746 THE DUKE

Tim Oaks

The locomotive makes a brave sight in varnished gloss red, with the nameplates mounted for the first time since 2001. It has had a warming fire lit in the firebox as part of the preparation for the final hydraulic test, this is to relieve stress and check for leaks. The regulator valve was found to be leaking through due to corrosion in store over the last two years; the valve has been lapped in by Simon Scott and this has cured that particular problem.

There is still a significant amount of work to do on the cab fittings and associated pipe connections and Simon, Mick and John are being kept very busy; Simon Scott and the Steam Team are assisting during the week.

News Bulletin: Immense progress has been made and the Festive Steam Gala saw the Duke in steam along with 80080 and 78018!

The Duke had to haul the first train un-aided when D14 Eric refused to start on the 31st December. The task was well and truly completed. See back page for the first photograph of the Duke in revenue earning service on the tracks for 23 years!

Smokey, since the brick arch has yet to be fitted, but running and working at last.



100 CLUB

WIN cash prizes in our quarterly draw and help the Association to finance exciting new projects.

Don't delay join today!

It costs just £1 a month, payable quarterly by standing order and you can, if you wish, to increase your chances of winning further, increase your number of entries. It is easy and you can be sure that you will be helping our railway grow. Draws will be held in April, July, October and then in December a super prize draw.

The prize money for each draw will be 50% of the funds held so the more entries, the more there will be to win!

This prize draw is open to anyone who wishes to support the 100 Club.

You can pick up a leaflet in the
Museum/Shop Building at Wirksworth Station.

Ecclesbourne Valley Railway Association is a registered charity (1106810)

It is the support organisation for the

Ecclesbourne Valley Railway

CHRISTMAS 2023



Above: Sunday 22nd Oct 2023: 80080 ends her day and joins 78018 in the yard who awaits her duties at EVR. She joined our resident locomotive on the Santa Specials later in the year.

photo © Trish Birks



Above: Sunday 3rd Dec 2023:

78018 is surprised by snow on her 3rd day of Christmas duties.

photo © Neil Ferguson-Lee



Above: Sparkling Deer on Platform 1 at Wirksworth Station.

photo © Trish Birks



Santa and Ebba, Richard Buckby's Granddaughter receives a Farm Set at the Aln Valley Railway.

photo by kind permission of Richard Buckby. ©



A grey sky is brightened by a Christmas Tree on the 27th Dec.

Photo © Trish Birks

STEAM GALA 31ST DEC 2023 AND 1ST JAN 2024

Our first EVR New Year Steam Gala took place over New Year's Eve & New Year's Day.

The resident locos were out in force with a brace of Standards, and The Duke. The class 31 substituted for the class 14, which refused to start. The model Railway was in action and attracted visitors as did the EVRA shop. See pictures over the page.



Bagnall 2746 The Duke with a rake.



The Duke passes the awaiting 31.



Above: A typical layout. This one depicts Idridgehay Station. Note the 'steam' from the locomotive.

The Model Railway has seen a revival of late with detailed layouts representing Wirksworth Yard and Idridgehay in the 1950s era.

Much work has been done by Eric Hills and his dedicated band of volunteers and enthusiasts who have made such a difference to the original layouts that resided in a dark and dismal container for many years.

Work continues to improve what we have and to add new attractions to the layouts presented.



80080 arrives in charge.



78018 arrives at Wirksworth.

All photos © the Editors



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100 CLUB GRAND CHRISTMAS PRIZE DRAW

Andrew Denham

1st Prize: 107 £79.07 K S

2nd Prize 260 £56.40 I S

3rd Prize 185 £45.18 D W

4th Prize 203 £22.59 J W

5th Prize 170 £22.59 S H Congratulations and thanks for your contributions.

Please note that legally, we are no longer allowed to give names so only initials appear here. All winners will be advised in the normal way.

HRA PASSES

John Hastings-Thomson

We have been asked to advise at the time of writing that no information is available as yet re 2024 HRA passes. John will be in touch as soon as the details are available for this year.

DERBY LIGHTWEIGHT POWER CAR 79018

Norman Ashfield



Steady progress continues on the Derby Lightweight Group's power car. In the autumn, raised up on the jacks, the bogies were moved underneath it again from under the bridge, and the car was transferred to the middle road of the Maintenance Shed.

This had the benefit of improving access for other urgent jobs on the road it was occupying, and now giving entry to 79018 from the raised metal platform.

Back on stands, the bogies have been released to the station end of the shed, preparatory for being worked on, and eventual turning of the wheelsets.

Almost everything on the underside of the car was found to be in poor condition. Work has continued on rusty battery boxes, now rebuilt, and the complicated job of rewiring.

Up above, the driver's compartment has been receiving attention, with new ply/laminate panelling to improve its looks; the rear gangway doors are

finished in aluminium instead of hardboard, and the gangway connection is being fettled and finished in green.



Top L: The cab gets some attention.

Above L: Wiring to be sorted

Above: The new elevated position.

All photos © Norman Ashfield



News from the pit indeed !

Our new maintenance pit is almost complete. The picture shows the impressive hydraulic pumping crane taking liquid concrete from the concrete mixer and feeding it into the wooden former to make the flat concrete pit sides. All we have to do now is reinstall the rail up to and over it.

On a sadder note, Barclay No 3 'Brian Harrison' developed a major fault whilst in use during a recent Steam Experience day. Subsequent investigations have identified the fault as a hole in the main steam pipe inside the boiler. This feeds the cylinders. It means a major dismantling exercise to access the offending item so, for the time being, No3 joins our other Barclay, 'Henry Ellison' in being out of traffic for the foreseeable future.

Every cloud has a silver lining though, and I'm pleased to say that Tim Oaks' J94 0-6-0 'The

Duke' has passed its official steam test and boiler exam. So, after a couple of shake down runs it will be put into traffic. Its first outing will be on New Year's Day at the first steam gala to be held over 31st Dec/1st Jan.

Std 4 80080 has been put back together after having a leaking small tube replaced and just awaits a steam test before, hopefully, re-joining the steam fleet.

Std 2 loco 78018 continues to perform admirably on the Santa Trains which have been extremely popular this year.

Finally, a word of thanks to our volunteers who have turned out in all weathers to keep our steam fleet running. I salute you !!

Merry Christmas and a prosperous New Year to everyone.
Running Shed Foreman (Steam).

DIESEL DEPARTMENT UPDATE

Oliver Hodgkinson

D9625 – **Out of service.** After completing a test run it was found that the engine was suffering with high water temperature. Further investigation found the coolant system to be heavily contaminated with many year's worth of crud! The cooler group has now been removed and stripped down for a full overhaul.

D9537 – **In service.** Recently the loco has suffered with a starter motor failure, but the quick work of the Class 14 Group saw the loco back in service within 48 hours. D9537 is currently working hard hauling Santa trains taking many happy passengers to the North Pole (situated near Cowers Lane just off the B5023).

31601 – **In service.** The loco has worked well through the season seeing plenty of use on Driver Experience Days, during the winter it takes a step down from front line service but is available to assist when needed

33103 – **Engine Overhaul.** The engine work has begun on 33103 which is being assisted by Heritage Rail LTD, involving a full strip down of the engine from top to bottom. All 8 cylinder heads, pistons and liners have been removed and sent to Nemesis Rail for overhaul. Once completed they will be returned ready for reassembly. The bottom end has received a full bearing and crank inspection to assess whether any bearings will need replacing and if any journals need attention. During the process several cracks have been found in the webbing of the block, this is a rare but known issue with Class 33 engines as they are a straight 8 formation and are prone to cracking at high stress points. Luckily, there is a procedure for repairing the cracks.

D1842 – **In service.** The loco was sent into action to cover for D9537 whilst it was having its start motor issue sorted. D1842 continues to run reliably and is on standby throughout the Santa season.

73001 – **In service.** The loco has been running quite a bit recently on works trains and in top and tail formation with the steam engine whilst Duffield is closed. As I am writing the loco is having another A exam to see it through Santa and the winter.

73210 – **Overhaul.** Not a huge amount of progress on 210 since the last Express, this is mainly down to the group receiving a support coach which will help aid the project going forward, the coach requires a bit of work to see it usable. Around working on the support coach, a little progression has been made on the body work around cab no.1 and the electrical cubicle has received its final coat of paint.

Tom & Charlie – **In service.** Both locos working happily in the yard shunting troublesome trucks.



Top L: 33103's engine during strip down, exhaust & rocker gear removed.

Top R:33103 having its cylinder head removed

Lower L: 33103's cylinder liners.

all photos © Oliver Hodgkinson

A ROLLERCOASTER YEAR

Neil Ferguson-Lee
Chairman WyvernRail PLC

As I write this, we have just four days of Santa Train operation before the team takes a very well-earned break for Christmas. This is a good time to reflect on the past year and to look forward to 2024.

We have had quite a few arrivals and departures of our own. Helen McKortel, our Operations Manager, left us in the Summer and is now running trains full of nuclear flasks. No reason to worry there: we shall miss Helen and her 'reckless optimism'! Replacing Helen has been Simon Scott who has joined us as General Manager and has made his mark on the operation of the railway, both in the public domain and behind the scenes. Mike Fairburn has retired, and Graham Bilbie has joined us from Network Rail to serve as our new Infrastructure Manager.

We have seen a staggering increase in our catering business and I have to compliment our catering team, led by Sam Weaver but including so many hard workers who cook, serve, clean, tidy up and start again the very next day. Our commercial team of Leigh and Donna have also expanded our partnerships with businesses who can help drive business to us and this too has led to an increase in turnover through fish & chip trains, visiting dinosaurs and, of course, our updated and improved Christmas experience which is getting five-star reviews.



The slip!

Photo © N. Ferguson-Lee

There has been one 'elephant in the room': the landslide at Duffield. First reported in February, it prevented full operation to Duffield until mid-June and this had an effect on our revenues in the first couple of months of our season. The terrible rains of October 20th brought the landslide back and was in danger of overwhelming the EVRA-funded reinforcements installed in May.

The landslide is now in the hands of the insurers, and we hope remedial work will commence early in the New Year. How long it will take we do not yet know but I am optimistic that the line will be operational early in the new operating season.

I am nervous in writing this piece because I fear that I may omit some groups or individuals who give their time and enthusiasm to our railway. We are far more than a railway; we are a

more follows —→

community of people with a common goal and diverse interests. We have the Vegetation Clearance Team, who keep the lineside clear and are often called-in at short notice to see to any trees that may have fallen in bad weather. The Permanent Way team are fighting a never-ending battle against entropy along the line: something that becomes more pressing as the effects of climate change cause high rainfall and periods of drought that punish the formation. In the maintenance shed, the likes of Ben, James, Joe, John, Dan, Chris, and others not only keep our rolling stock pristine but restore vehicles and even bring pieces of plant and equipment back from near scrap condition to mint to help our permanent way and vegetation clearance teams.

It's not just the engineers: we have a model, miniature and narrow-gauge railway that have the potential to develop young enthusiasts from model to full-size trains, and I must make special mention of our two gardeners James and Mick who keep Wirksworth Station Approach looking so smart, plus all those who erect, maintain and repair our station buildings. The EVRA Museum and Shop is a delight to visit and Mike and Pat Craft and their team deserve applause for the care and dedication they give to this jewel in our crown.

Our platforms are a credit to us, not only at Wirksworth, but especially at Duffield, which is our gateway to the national network, while I feel strongly that Idridgehay and Shottle are resources that are just waiting to be developed to the railway's benefit.

Finally, we must never forget our traincrews and preparation teams who work at all hours in the day to make sure our trains are presentable, punctual and a delight to use.

I salute you all and thank you for your dedication to our community. I am very optimistic indeed for the future, despite the challenges we face. We have a smart and popular railway that attracts praise from those who visit. Twenty-three years ago, the railway was cold, messy, and empty. Now it is somewhere where people want to linger and return, and the reason is simple: it is the strength of our community that makes us a successful team and this is what will keep us making progress.

MEMO RE: CATHRYN

Andrew Denham



This picture was caught by one of our drivers who spotted Cathryn, who is on loan to Peak Rail, near to Sainsbury's store in Matlock recently.

Nice to see her in revenue earning trim again.

MUSINGS OF AN IDRIDGHAY CROSSING KEEPER Jonathan Tillin

I apologise once again to my car's suspension as it bumps over the drainage trench. It's the birth of 2024. The morning is bright and I am looking forward to the day's steam gala. I always enjoy the time spent at the crossing though I'm never quite prepared for rain like when both Storm Henke and the night closed in. In this crossing cabin I get time to read or write or just think. I can do all these things at home of course but it's nice to be a part of something bigger with the bonus of 'big steam'.

I book on, set out my stall, unlock the gates and check them, their lights and my Bardic; light the heater and put the kettle on. People are already arriving to take photos of the first train (topped and tailed). I'm out there waiting for it, gates set and bolted, big yellow hand-signalling flag unfurled. Our official position for Up (towards Duffield) moves means the approaching train is obscured by the Stop Board and the cabin, so the flag is held out wide until I see the loco then drawn in away from the line but still visible to the footplate crew. Friendly greetings as the train passes, watch checked for passing time and then the gates are opened again to the road. As I furl my flag I look up the line at a wonderful sight of steam and heritage in action; I muse that were I not so occupied I might take some photos.

The isolation does have its downsides: 'where on earth has that train got to?' being a particular one thought. We are fortunate to have the webcam at Wirksworth - that at least tells me when, or if, it has left. Still, it would be nice to be in the loop with comms: I had to learn about the boiler-water filling delay from a member of the public.

A fry-up at lunch time is a satisfying break in my day but not much spare time. The joy of galas of course is the intensity of the service. The sun has disappeared by 14.00 and I decide to put the gate lights on; possibly a bit early but it can get grey and murky at this location. It was a busy day with lots to do but I realised it was going to be longer than planned because of the on-going delays. I had wished the 16.00 service had not been scheduled - I felt it made the end of the day unnecessarily late but, then again, maybe night-running is part of the fun!

The unexpected pleasure of a crossing colleague dropping in is an excuse to put the kettle on. We so rarely get to meet and chat so it's a nice opportunity to put a name to a face. I also love the interaction with passers-by and am always vaguely amused when someone with a hi-vis tells me they have permission to be my side of the fence - they always get a polite refusal; "Have you booked on?" works if nothing else does. There are locals I know by sight and walkers who stop and chat. I have learned the countryside is not always a place of birdsong and rustling leaves: on New Year's Day there was a constant mechanical whine most of the day, stopping only at twilight. Other times there is shooting (or bird-scarers), grass mowers or loud parties but not all of the time and certainly not every time I'm there.

I've learned to bring a large water bottle as it saves asking for some to be dropped off. It reminds me of starting on the big railway in 1966 when there were still remote boxes that had a water cannister dropped of by the first 'stopper'.

Twilight and the rain has arrived before the next Up train. Friendly yellow Bardic lamp at the ready I open the gates again and give a yellow light: the footplate crew give a whistle in acknowledgement and over it passes. Then night falls and it's just the last two Down trains. I stand in the open doorway listen keenly for the exhaust sound in the valley having done a quick calculation in my head as to the likely passing time. Experience tells me the train crew will have checked that no-one wants to get off here so I'm prepared for a non-stop run. I set the gates shortly before I see the loco headlamp and hold up the Bardic as high as I can. I'm in signal engineer mode (my work pre-retirement) and thinking of the instruction to drivers on the GWR in the 1840s: 'If the signal is not visible you must not pass it'.

Last train passes with a chorus of 'thank-you' from the crew and that's it. Crossing Register completed, all secured and locked up I get in the car and book off. That's that for a while...

