

***2014/15 Report***



# ***Chairman's Review***

**Society Chairman Tom O'Flaherty looks back over a year of great progress.**

It has been an incredibly busy year since we all met at the last AGM in June 2014.

The main objective of the Society is to have the Panel installed in a building at Didcot Railway Centre, wired up to a simulator and with visitors using it, hands-on. We're not there quite yet but together we've made huge strides towards the goal.

## **Panel Move**

Postponement – after many delays it is looking like the current closure plan for Swindon panel is December 2015.

Logistics – much detailed planning work has been done involving Danny Scroggins, Richard Antliff, Network Rail and others.

The current plan is to construct a frame beneath the panel so we lift the robust structure with the panel bolted onto it (Mary Rose style) rather than the fragile panel itself. The whole thing will then be slid out onto the roof, craned onto a lorry and protected from the elements prior to being driven Didcot West Yard. Didcot Railway Centre (DRC) has no road access so the panel must be loaded onto a wagon and moved by trip working into the Railway Centre. Finally it will be steam-craned off the wagon and slid into its new home through the double doors. Some bricks have been left loose deliberately so they can be removed if the lifting frame is too wide for the doors!

As an aside we do now have a little experience of moving panels into DRC but on a much smaller scale – Newbury Emergency Panel!

## **Electronics**

Hackspace, a group of electronics enthusiasts in Reading, have been helping us work out precisely how we'll eventually connect the 1968 panel to a modern computer. They've designed interface boards and procured these from China. Wires coming out of the panel, one per bulb and switch, will be connected to these boards which will be the filling in the sandwich between the panel and the computer

As we don't yet have the real panel we have created a wooden "Wooden Bassett" mini panel for testing purposes!

SPS member Jon Tillin kindly created a "demo panel" for us which has proved very useful indeed. It is a proof-of-concept that the old panel technology can indeed be linked to a computer via interface boards. Also it has been very useful on the exhibition stand to help explain to visitors what they'll eventually be able to see.

## **Fundraising**

During the year we were granted charitable status. This enables us, amongst other things, to reclaim Gift Aid on donations and subscriptions and gives us more credibility when fundraising.

First Great Western kindly donated some juicy items for us to us in fundraising. A cab ride and map boards were auctioned and First Class tickets were raffled. The current auction, ending at the AGM, is for Penzance Sleeper tickets. Thank you to everyone who has supported these either by buying or selling raffle tickets or by bidding in the auction.

Our logo-clothing has recently launched to supplement merchandise already available (ties, mugs, coasters, etc)

## **Research**

In April 2015 current and former signalmen and SPS supporters gathered in the Great Western Hotel in Swindon, just across the road from the panel itself, to reminisce about their experiences.

An Operations Board, comprised of volunteers, has been meeting most weeks by teleconference to document what the configuration of the railway would have been in the mid-1980's. Our aim, once the panel is safely at DRC and working, is to replace Domino tiles as necessary to represent the layout existing in this period. We intend to procure the new tiles directly from Henry Williams Ltd, who are still able to make them to order years after making the original Panel.

## Building Progress

The DRC Civil Engineering Group, assisted by SPS members and led by Richard Antliff, have been busy since September 2014 digging foundations, assembling steel reinforcements and pouring concrete. Bricks have been rising from the ground since early May and it is becoming more real that we'll have a building for the panel to live in. We anticipate the roof will be on in the autumn and the work of fitting out the building can then commence.



SPS member Ian Dixon has created a fabulous virtual model on computer of how the new building will look. This enables a "walk-through" of the building before it is finally fixed in bricks and mortar, enabling last minute changes to be made.

## Promotional Activities

We have been represented on TV/radio and in the newspapers in recent months, including a television appearance on BBC Points West. We have as always been very active on the internet and social media raising awareness.

We ran the usual stands at DRC and the Reading Kenavon model railway show. Thank you to everyone who gave their time to help. Not only do we spread awareness of our project to visitors, but we also learn a lot about how they react to what we're planning, what interests them.

## Fun Activities

We enjoyed several visits in the last year, including a Society trip to the South Devon Railway in the autumn where we hired our own train and visited all the signal boxes on the line. A small group were also lucky to visit New Street Box, right in the middle of Birmingham, by a stroke of chance when an earlier planned visit had to be postponed. We also arranged a visit to the NRM including working the L&Y signal school layout.

SPS is increasingly part of the wider DRC team. We're very grateful to DRC for providing us with such a welcoming home and for their support in so many ways. We try to give back whenever we can. Several SPS members helped as Santa's elves during the Christmas Thomas events. Quite apart from being a lot of fun, these days are critical to DRC's survival. The income generated helps to sustain the Centre through the remainder of the year. SPS members Mark and Natalie have joined the DRC retail team.

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The trustees and I continue to be very impressed with the overwhelming support the Society receives from its members. This support comes in the form of enthusiasm and interest in our activities, contribution to our progress in the form of practical help on working days and event stands, and of course the financial help that you have either contributed yourself or contributed to the generation of.

It is amazing how much work there is to do in even the apparently-simplest of tasks, and there is no doubt that the successful preservation and exhibition of Swindon Panel is something that no small number of people can achieve. So thank you very much to everyone who has contributed in any way, big or small, in the past year.

Many hands make light work, and the more hands the merrier! So never be afraid to join in in any way you can, you'll always be most welcome!

A society *is* its members, not its aspirations or its assets. So thank you for making Swindon Panel Society the society that it is. And what an amazing educational exhibit Swindon Panel will soon be because of that!





Fitting the first windows in June 2015. The windows were recovered from the old railway buildings at the from of Didcot Parkway station.

# Finance

**Society Treasurer Brian Davis' 2013/2014 financial review.**

## Overview

The society maintains 'Receipt and Payment' accounts and this report is for the period 6 April 2014 to 5 April 2015. At the start of the year the society had funds of £8,370 as reported at last year's AGM. At the end of 2014/15 we had increased this total by £13,420 to £21,790. The bank account at the end of the financial period stood at £21,867. (The difference between funds and bank account figures is due to transactions pending clearing.)

## 2014/15 Financial Objectives Achieved

As reported last year we needed to raise £10,000 in this period for the 2014 instalment of the panel building costs and also £5,000 for the anticipated panel movement expenses. As you can see from the above figures we have easily achieved this. The June 2014 building payment of £10,000 was deferred until June 2015 at the request of the Great Western Society. Also, due to the further delay in closure of the panel itself, we have not needed to spend any of the £5,000 earmarked for the panel move. This money will be available when needed for that purpose.

## 2015/16 Financial Objectives

As mentioned above funds have already been raised for the panel move and we have also raised the required £5,000 for the 2015 instalment of the building costs. Once again the Great Western Society has requested that we defer payment for the time being, but that money is available when it is required.

## Future Financial Objectives

Over the next 2 to 3 years our main financial objectives are to raise the remaining £10,000 toward the building costs; £5,000 due in June 2016 and the final £5,000 due in June 2017. We also need to fund the equipment and materials needed to restore and begin operating the panel in its new building. Beyond this it is anticipated that there will only be maintenance and operating expenses required.

## Funding Methods

In order to achieve these objectives, we will continue to raise funds in the same way as before. This is mainly through memberships and donations, with merchandise sales and society events also contributing. Our application for a Heritage Lottery Grant was unfortunately unsuccessful, the process taught us a lot, however, and we may apply again in the future if appropriate. We have received some sponsorship from companies, notably from Signet Solutions Ltd. Henry Williams who originally designed and built the panel have agreed to help as well with discount on new Domino tiles. We will pursue other sponsorships where appropriate.

## Gift Aid

I am delighted to be able to report that we have now been registered with HMRC for tax purposes. This means that we will soon be able to claim gift aid on donations and membership subscriptions, so it is vitally important that everyone fills out a Gift Aid form to enable us to claim back 25% of all eligible funds.

The registration for Gift Aid has been the end of a very long administrative path (remember the EGM back in November?), so I am also delighted to report that society member Peter Whatley has kindly volunteered to lead the Gift Aid drive for us. Peter is completing the arrangements with the HMRC and the research into exactly what can and can't be claimed to maximise the return for the Society.



# Membership

## Overview

In 2014 we were delighted to appoint Cheryl Davis (wife of Brian Davis, Society Treasurer) as the Membership Secretary and many of you will have received emails and correspondence from her over the last year.

We currently have 173 paid up members with a few renewals outstanding. A detailed breakdown of the membership can be seen in the attached summary sheet.

## 2015 Membership Structure

For 2015 we have reviewed the membership structure and have made a number of changes. The “Silver 3” membership option has been withdrawn and the Silver membership fee for 2015 has been reduced from £40 to £30. Bronze membership remains unchanged.

The other change which takes effect as from the end of the AGM meeting on 27 June 2015 is the withdrawal of Gold membership. Gold membership was very important over the last two years as the bulk of the society funds were needed at the beginning of the project and this was an excellent way of achieving that. A steady regular income is needed in the future which is best served with regular annual membership subscriptions.

The membership gifts for 2015 have been maintained and Silver membership holders receive a set of Swindon Panel coasters with the exclusive “sixth” coaster. Gold members have continued to receive a Society tie.

## Renewals

All members who joined when the society began in late 2013 had their memberships dated from the beginning of 2014, so the society only experienced its first renewals in the beginning of 2015. As can be seen from the summary sheet, we have had 52 renewals so far this year although 18 members have not yet renewed.

## New Members

All members in 2014 were new members and at the end of the year we had 163 in total. So far in 2015 we have added another 28 members to the Society.

**Below: SPS members and supporters at our gathering in Swindon.**



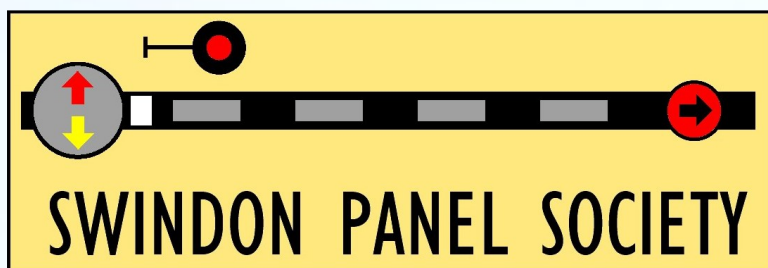




Above: The building site in June 2015. Below: SPS visits another signal box.







[www.swindonpanel.org.uk](http://www.swindonpanel.org.uk)

