

MINUTES OF THE 56th ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE TALYLLYN RAILWAY
PRESERVATION SOCIETY

Held at Neuadd Pendre Social Centre, Brook Street, Tywyn, Gwynedd on September 30th, 2006

On the platform were Gareth Jones, Chairman TRPS; Keith Theobald, Chairman TR Co; Garry Mumford, Hon. Treasurer, TRPS and Accountant, TR Co; John Robinson, Hon. Secretary, TRPS and Secretary, TR Co, and MRFS as Minute-taker. There were 217 members present. Gareth Jones opened the meeting at 3.30p.m.

1. Apologies

Apologies had been received from Vice-President Dai Jones and eight other members.

2. Minutes of the 55th AGM

The Minutes of the 55th AGM of the Society, held at Tywyn on September 24th, 2005, having been circulated to members of the Society at that date, were proposed by **Gareth Jones** to be taken as read; this was agreed without dissent and he duly signed the minutes as being a true record.

3. Matters arising from the Minutes

Chris White requested a review of what he considered to be the unconstitutional status of dog members. **Lawrence Garvey** replied that the membership of the TRPS was open to all persons and his dictionary defined a person as a "being, creature, organism, life or body", which he felt included dogs. At that date there were 31 dogs known to be junior or associate junior members, the vast majority owned by working volunteers. He queried if an employee's dog would be entitled to a staff pass.

Jon Mann thanked Lawrence for clearing up the mess. **Chris Price** was concerned about dogs dodging the adult subscription. **Gareth Jones** suggested setting up a working group to look at this furry issue. **George Gardiner** wondered if dogs could vote? **John Robinson** replied, "only if they have signed their membership cards." **Chris White** felt most strongly that the Constitution was being 'bent', and he recommended that legal advice be sought. Gareth Jones asked Chris to elucidate exactly what he considered the problem. Chris stated that he had grave concerns about the loss of revenue to the Traffic Department and the possible abuse of voting privileges. **Russell Prince** stated that he did not care, as the dogs were generating membership income. **Mike Davies** advised most strongly against taking legal advice. **Gareth** noted that the previous AGM had made its views on the subject very clear and moved on to non-canine business.

4. Election of President

Gareth Jones asked the meeting to endorse the Council's nomination of Richard Hope OBE as President. This was agreed without dissent. **Richard Hope** took the Chair and said how honoured he was to be elected President, commenting that all present should be proud of what the TRPS had achieved, especially in the face of the explosion in heritage railways since the 1950s. He looked forward to being President for several years to come.

John Robinson read out a letter from **Christopher Awdry** written in July and addressed to the meeting. He was sad not to be nominated for President again but stood down under protest as he had no wish to cause infighting. He thanked the Society for the privilege of acting as its President for the past four years. **Gareth Jones** responded that exhaustive attempts had been made to contact Chris to discuss the position. A meeting had finally taken place which had been far more amicable than the correspondence suggested.

5. Alterations to the Constitution and Rules of the Society

Richard Hope asked **John Robinson** to explain the changes detailed in the June *Talyllyn News*. John briefly summarized the proposals, commenting that this was generally a tidying-up exercise. Richard explained that no amendments could be tabled at the meeting and that if there were no objections he would take the alterations *en bloc*. This was agreed and the alterations were overwhelmingly approved by the floor, securing the required two-thirds majority.

6. Vice-Presidents

In accordance with the transitional provisions for the Rules changes, the following remain as Vice-Presidents for life: Peter Austin, John Bate, James Boyd, Philip Care, Alan Holmes, Richard Hope OBE, Dai Jones, Winston McCanna, Major P M Olver OBE, Sonia Rolt, Roy Smith, Don Southgate, Jeremy Wilkinson and Maurice Wilson. **Richard Hope** noted that he was the first to be both a Vice-President and President at the same time. Richard recollected a walk on the South Downs in 1965 during which he had persuaded Colin Roobottom to become Treasurer of the Society and Accountant to the Company; now he had completed his final set of annual accounts and was nominated by the Council for the office of Vice-President. Richard put the question to the meeting and **Colin Roobottom** was elected unanimously. After the election, **David Mitchell** invited Colin on to the stage and thanked him for his service of over forty years. He presented him with a copy of a book about the Leek and Manifold Light Railway, commenting that Colin's service to the Talylyn had lasted longer than the Leek and Manifold had been open, and a framed photograph of Colin driving locomotive 5 *Midlander* on the former sliding siding at Tŷ Mawr.

7. Appointment of Independent Examiners

The appointment of Silver & Co as the Society's Independent Examiners was proposed by **Peter Austin**, seconded by Roger Whitehouse and agreed by the meeting. **Peter Silver** thanked the meeting for re-appointing his firm.

8. Election of Honorary Secretary

John Robinson had been nominated in accordance with the rules, this was put to the meeting by **Richard Hope** and agreed without dissent.

9. Election of ten members of Council

John Robinson read out the names of the fourteen candidates and they stood to be recognized. The ballot papers were then collected. Later in the meeting **Peter Silver** announced the results of the election: 233 papers had been returned, 1,883 votes being cast as follows: Peter Austin 139, Phil Guest 155, Bill Heynes 165, Gareth Jones 203, Ian Lloyd-Owen 114, Lis Mann 170, Dave Pegg 38, Phil Sayers 159, John Smallwood 196, Nick Smith 37, Keith Theobald 192, Tony Thorpe 106, Matthew Wear 78, Sue Whitehouse 131. Mmes Mann and Whitehouse and Messrs Austin, Guest, Heynes, Jones, Lloyd-Owen, Sayers, Smallwood and Theobald were declared elected. Permission was given to destroy the papers in the traditional manner.

10. Reception, Approval and Adoption of Reports

Richard Hope invited **Gareth Jones** to present the report of Council. Following custom, Gareth saw no need to reiterate the printed report. He commented that the Railway had lost three stalwarts from the ranks of active volunteers during the past year: Tony Bennett, Graham Jenkins and Phil Glazebrook. He felt this was an appropriate time to remember them and proposed a round of applause in their memory; this was loudly given and Gareth believed that wherever they were, their spirits must have heard the noise. During the year, the computerized booking system for operating volunteers had gone live and was proving to be successful, Council meetings were now permanently open to observers, and the forthcoming Santa Specials had been reorganized to make them even more successful. He commented on the work of the Strategic Planning Group on which there was to be a presentation later in the meeting. He understood that there were grounds for cautious optimism in the progress towards selecting a new General Manager. Gareth thanked all the employees and volunteers who had been involved, either in running the Railway or undertaking supporting activities, whether locally or farther afield, over the past year. He invited **David Mitchell** to give the up-to-date figures. He reported that public bookings were down 4.7% at 39,390 humans, total passenger bookings were 45,181 (down 4.3%, but slightly up on 2004) and journeys were 84,523 (down 4.1%); however, traffic revenue was up 5.8% at £296,248. The Shop had taken £112,982 (virtually level with 2005) and Catering was up 17.7% at £159,183. **Garry Mumford** presented the Financial Statements, commenting that he felt a bit of an imposter as these accounts were Colin Roobottom's swansong. The results showed a much improved position: the Shop had enjoyed a record year and the café had moved into profit; however, the Railway was suffering from increased fuel costs and the national minimum

wage. The Value Added Tax issue referred to in Note 13 had been raised by Revenue and Customs at the end of 2005 and there was no tangible progress on it to report; a VAT expert was being employed as the issues were very technical. Garry was also grateful for the interest free loans from members. His own effort had mainly been directed towards computerization of the accounting system and he was grateful for the assistance of David Mitchell, Colin Roobottom and notably Peter Austin as a volunteer Accounts Assistant. The fruits of this work would begin to be seen next year.

Richard Hope invited questions on the reports.

Mike Davies sought an explanation of Gift Aid, he wondered if membership subscriptions or donations paid with subscriptions could be gift aided. **Garry Mumford** explained that Gift Aid could only be reclaimed by a charity and therefore only gifts to Talylyn Holdings were eligible. He assured Mike that relevant donations given with subscriptions were now forwarded to Holdings, even those paid by standing order, the form having been approved by HMRC.

Chris White felt that it was disgusting that the membership total was being inflated by 1% for 31 dogs. **Richard Hope** retorted that the Society was still getting the membership revenue.

Nigel Adams enquired the current total of the fund for Graham Jenkin's daughter. **Gareth Jones** reported that it currently stood at £2,767.64; it would remain open to the end of the year and further donations would be welcome.

Richard Hope proposed the adoption of the Report of Council and the Financial Statements of the Society for the year ended 31st January, 2006; this was agreed without dissent.

11. Presentation by the Strategic Planning Group

Garry Mumford, using a computer and projector, outlined the analysis contained in the Business Strategy Plan published in the September *Talylyn News* and explained the initial business plan, aimed at increasing passenger traffic by a moderate volume. He stressed that this was just the first step of a continuing process and invited questions on the work of the Group thus far.

Ian Lloyd-Owen expressed concern that a cruise ship could turn a profit with an 80% passenger loading at full price and the remainder of berths then being sold at a substantial discount; the Railway could not operate in this way. What happened if we did not get the additional passenger numbers? How would we get the extra 'bums on seats'? **Chris Price** worried that we were tying our hands behind our backs by "preserving the Talylyn ethos" at all costs; we could not rule out controlling expenditure; we should identify empty trains and remove them from the timetable. He also felt that the Railway must, somehow, increase its market share; he had seen an advertisement for a rival operation on the back of a 'bus. He didn't know the costs involved and recognized the need to get our message across the border into England; however, Arriva was a local operator and he wondered why we did not advertise on their fleet. A voice from the floor suggested advertising on Mr. Lloyd-Owen's own coach.

Garry responded that there was a big difference between controlling costs and cutting costs; in order to make the operation profitable solely by reducing services we should have to slash the number of trains operated. Success would then depend on the public travelling in similar numbers on a less-attractive service.

Russell Prince commented that the Railway needed to spend more money on marketing. **Mike Davies** commented that the SPG had made a start but we needed to go further. He would like to see greater analysis of the shop and catering units so that profit from these areas could be maximized to subsidize the operation of the Railway. A member commented that Tywyn needed a decent hotel; the lack had cost us a substantial amount of coach party traffic and we should seriously consider buying the Corbett Arms Hotel when it came on to the market. At the request of the President, **David Leech** estimated that we had lost about 35 coach parties due to the lack of suitable nearby accommodation; the nearest hotels available to them were in Barmouth, Aberystwyth and Criccieth. In addition, the Railway had lost all the former Wallace Arnold and Shearings traffic this year because of internal difficulties with their amalgamation, but had made this up from new coach operators.

Jon Mann reminded those present that the Railway was operating in a very competitive market place. We had a great asset in being "The World's First Preserved Railway" and we should promote this. He pointed out that Morwellham Quay had made a selling point from at one time having had enough arsenic on the quayside to poison the entire population of the world. **Dave Nash** thought it ought not to be difficult to improve marketing; he had seen outlets with Bala Lake, Rheidol and Fairbourne timetables but no Talylyn ones. **Sue Whitehouse** eagerly piped up that we needed to experiment with

our marketing; in the light of earlier discussion she suggested that we advertise at Crufts. **Phil Higginson** wondered if the Talyllyn could piggyback on the marketing plans of other attractions in the area. He drew attention to a Festiniog and Welsh Highland aim to carry 50,000 extra passengers a year. **Garry Mumford** observed that Caernarvon and Porthmadog were visited by many more tourists than Tywyn.

Sheila Jennings reported that last year a journalist had visited the Railway, resulting in an article this summer in a Women's Institute magazine. She felt we should be looking to attract journalists from a wider range of magazines and not just the railway press. **Martin Fuller** warned that 'bums on seats' on timetabled passenger trains were not the total answer. The Railway needed to develop footplate experiences, weddings and other such 'add-ons' which were, perhaps, in their infancy.

Richard Hope introduced a collection in aid of improvements on the South side of the line at Wharf. **Keith Theobald** explained that, *inter alia*, this would allow the reconstruction of the weighbridge and the successors to Pooley and Sons, Avery Weigh-Tronix, had expressed an interest in helping with the work. The collection raised approximately £1,632 (including the anticipated tax refund under the Gift Aid scheme).

12. Starting Time of Annual General Meeting

Richard Hope introduced a debate on changing the start time of the Meeting. Jane Garvey had been a proponent but was unable to attend that day because of family illness. **Chris Price** spoke as Chairman of the Society and Membership Committee and proposed that the start time be moved forward by half-an-hour to 1500. **Derek Allen** bemoaned the reduction in special services leading to fewer photographic opportunities. **Mike Davies** was utterly puzzled as to the benefits of a change. **Richard** called for an indicative vote which was overwhelmingly in favour of keeping the current starting time.

13. Miscellaneous announcements

Philip Sayers announced the results of the Young Members' Group election: 38 papers had been returned with 176 votes cast as follows: Phil Eaton 23, Richard Garvey 27, Neil Jones 31, Andrew Robinson 32, Sam Rowbotham 16, Deborah Sharpe 15, Marc Smith 11, Matthew Wear 3, Kate Wroblewska 13, Jon Young 5. He declared Messrs Eaton, Garvey, Jones, Robinson, and Rowbotham duly elected and expressed his commiserations to the unsuccessful candidates.

Noel Williams reported that the 'Talyllyn Tote' now raised about £1,600 *per annum* for the Society, and invited members of the platform party to draw numbers for October. Roelof van der Molen was the principal prize-winner.

Tony Randall advertised 'Steampipes', which would be held on 6th December at the Friends' Meeting House near Euston Station, and the London Area Group Christmas dinner to be held on 4th December at the Albert Tavern in Victoria Street.

Lawrence Garvey plugged the Midland Area Group Christmas dinner, which would be held on the 5th December in Sutton Coldfield; tickets would be available from the Membership Secretaries. He also appealed for help at the Warley Model Railway Exhibition to be held at the National Exhibition Centre the preceding weekend.

Keith Theobald reminded members that Outdoor Weeks were advertised in the *Talyllyn News*. As always additional volunteers would be warmly welcomed and work would be available to suit everyone.

Winston McCanna reported that Raymond Earl had won the 'Hat for Graham' auction advertised in the September *News* with a bid of £60, to be added to the memorial fund.

Ian Lloyd-Owen presented the archives with copies of photographs taken 35 years ago and during September 2006, the latter re-enacting the scene of the former.

14. Other Business

Sam Lolley asked why photographs of children were no longer published in the *Talyllyn News*; he looked forward to such pictures, particularly of *Tracksiders* appearing again. **John Robinson** replied that the Society had been obliged to seek legal advice, which was to publish such pictures only with written parental consent. He emphasized that the present instruction to the Editor was an interim measure until the position had been clarified. **Gareth Jones** added that he would use his best endeavours to ensure a satisfactory outcome.

There being no further business, **Richard Hope** declared close of play at 17.31.