

Members' Bulletin



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AUGUST IS ESTA SURVEY MONTH:

Tell us about the local journeys you make by train and bus this month. Enclosed is a questionnaire for you to complete - and more can be obtained from our Secretary. We want to know the good and bad points and shall issue a report of the survey during the autumn.

ON-TRAIN QUESTIONNAIRE:

From August 9th-15th and September 20th-26th, ESTA members will be handing out and collecting questionnaires on Ipswich - Lowestoft and Lowestoft - Norwich trains, to find out passengers' views on the possible moving of Lowestoft station. Free passes will be provided. Thank you to members who have already volunteered. More will be welcome. Please contact our Secretary and state on which day(s) you would be available.

THANK YOU to members who helped with the ESTA stall at recent events in Saxmundham, Southwold and Pakefield. If you can help at the East Anglian Transport Museum (September 12th-13th) and/or Ipswich Transport Museum (October 4th), please let Rod Lock know.

AUTUMN MEETING:

ESTA's autumn meeting will be on Saturday October 24th in St Marks Church Centre, just across the bridge from Oulton Broad South station, starting at 14.30. There will be reports and discussion of local public transport issues and we shall welcome as guest speaker Mr Mitchell Bradshaw, Suffolk County Council's Public Transport Manager.

150TH ANNIVERSARY CONTINUES..

You can still enter the quiz on the Tide Mill Walk, featured on our anniversary leaflet enclosed with the last bulletin, up to August 31st.

From October 4th - 31st our exhibition will again be on display, at the Long Shop Museum, Leiston. If you missed it before, this would be a good chance to see it. The buses to and from Saxmundham stop outside the Long Shop which is open daily 10.00 to 17.00 (Sundays 11.00 to 17.00) and has a special "Final Fling" event on October 18th.

Our exhibition material is also available for display, all or in part, at other events.

FOUNDERS HONOURED:

At the Annual General Meeting, members appointed Mr Albert Godfrey as President of ESTA and Mrs Olga Awty as Vice-President. They were both founder members of our association in 1965 and campaigned against the closure threat to the East Suffolk Line.

CELEBRATING 150TH ANNIVERSARY

Thank you to all ESTA members and other local people who worked together to make the 150th birthday of the East Suffolk Line a memorable occasion.

Curtain raiser to the celebrations was the visit of Britannia class steam locomotive "Oliver Cromwell" which hauled a special train along the line on Saturday May 16th. Stations were thronged with sightseers that morning, and it was a good opportunity for us to display and distribute our 4-page leaflet about the anniversary and the events we had organised.

Our exhibition at Saxmundham Museum opened that morning and attracted a large number of visitors.

The exhibition was also shown at Beccles, Halesworth, Woodbridge and Wickham Market during May, June and early July. Thanks are particularly due to David Adams, Ken Howe, Alan Holloway, Alan Williams, Mike Farahar, Peter Cannon, Bryan Hall, Rod Lock and Trevor Garrod for their help with the exhibitions.

On June 17th Rod Lock also gave a talk on local railway history to the Over-55s club at Halesworth Library, and attracted an audience of 25 - more than usual.

The East Anglian Daily Times gave us particularly good publicity, featuring the Saxmundham Museum exhibition on May 18th and a 2-page illustrated article by Steven Russell on June 6th.

June 1st, the actual 150th anniversary of the line, fell on a working day for most of us; and so we had decided to hold our centrepiece celebration on Saturday May 30th.

Members and guests enjoyed a very pleasant lunch at the Bell Hotel, Saxmundham, before proceeding next door to the Market Hall for a Public Meeting, where more anniversary material was also on display.

Over 40 people attended the meeting (on a warm sunny afternoon which also coincided with the Cup Final). ESTA Chairman Trevor Garrod opened it by reading a message from former Anglian Railways Managing Director Tim Clarke, who wrote:

"Unfortunately I cannot attend the celebrations, but I do hope you all thoroughly enjoy the event.

"Without the work of the East Suffolk Travellers' Association, the route may have become just a memory. I therefore pay tribute to all of you who have worked for so many years to improve services on the line.

"As Britain's railways continue to regain their popularity, the East Suffolk Line justly retains its place amongst them."

ESTA's Chairman then gave a talk entitled, "The East Suffolk Line - not just a railway." He stated that the line was not just a ribbon of steel between Ipswich and Lowestoft; it was also part of the fabric of our local communities - "it has been, and still is, part of the lives of many people."

Indeed, there would be no anniversary to celebrate now if a number of local people had not organised and protested against the closure proposal in the summer and autumn of 1965. He mentioned in particular Albert Godfrey, Donald Newby, Mrs Daly Briscoe, Arthur Hadingham, Ian Carter, Mrs Olga Awty, Arthur Barrett Jenkins, John and Faith Packard, Brian Hunter and Donald Durrant. Back in 1859, the new railway linked towns such as Saxmundham to the growing rail network and the capital; and it provided competition for the toll, or turnpike, road (otherwise known as the A12.)

Most passengers in those early days were probably the better-off, who could afford to travel; but by the end of the 19th century holidaymakers and day-trippers were also using it; and the goods services had contributed to the growth of towns such as Leiston, Halesworth and Beccles.

Up to the First World War, the railways had developed largely a monopoly in public transport; but from the 1920s the bus and the car started to compete. By the 1960s, some politicians and indeed transport managers argued that bus could replace train. In July 1965, Donald Newby chartered a bus from Lowestoft to Ipswich and showed that over such a distance it could not. Press cuttings from that time showed a young man called Wilfrid George trying to load his bicycle on to the bus...

The line was reprieved by the Minister for Transport, and Mr. Garrod then traced its subsequent development - through paytrains then radio signalling and automatic crossings; with the cost savings resulting in extra late evening and Sunday trains. With through trains again to London since 1999, and especially since 2004, he said, "the line can still compete with the toll road, for example on journeys like Woodbridge to Chelmsford or Saxmundham to Colchester as well as to and from London.. But to compete more effectively we need a more frequent service and some increase in line speed."

Mr John Bolton, a retired railway engineer, gave a very interesting talk about his career, which started in Crewe locomotive works and continued via Derby, Euston, Plymouth and British Railways Board headquarters 222, Marylebone Road, London. He also spent time working in the Norwich Division.

Our speaker explained that the railway was a complex and intricate organisation which needed discipline. The railway had always changed and adapted and, he said, "There was no golden era. Each era was different.

Mr Bolton described the transition from steam to diesel - some of which was "rushed for political reasons" - and the way in which track maintenance was gradually mechanised. Later he was involved in staff training, which brought its own challenges as men moved from picks and shovels to complex equipment. He was given the freedom to break away from rigid rules, and commented, "Rules are for the guidance of the wise and the rigid observance of fools."

It was important to keep the trains running and to time. Staff had to keep in mind that they were trying to serve the people in the trains.

His last post, as Plant and Machinery Engineer, involved maintenance and repair of rolling stock, which sometimes meant that he also drove the train. He described the skills needed in, for example, using the plunger to bring the barriers down at Darsham; or easing the brake very gently on the first up train on winter mornings, when the rails could be very slippery.

Another aspect of life on East Anglian lines was the "pheasant roster". When a train hit a pheasant, the next signalman was told and a patrolling ganger picked up the bird.

In conclusion, Mr. Bolton said that in his railway career he had "run the whole gamut of emotions - but was never bored."

Our final speaker was Mr James Steward, Area Manager Rural Routes for National Express East Anglia. His railway career had taken him to posts in Colchester, Norwich and Ipswich and since March 2009 he had been in charge of NXEA's rural services, responsible for operating and ticketing staff. He was also in charge of station adopters and wanted to develop this system further.

Passengers numbers had remained stable, despite an expected downturn in the current economic climate. 2007-8 had seen a 32% increase in rural service usage. NXEA was doing work with tourist attractions in a bid to encourage more London and Essex people to visit the area. This included e-mail shots to commuters and working with the local media. A "Station Pride" event had also been organised on the Harwich branch.

"Beccles loop is getting ever closer", said Mr Steward, adding that NXEA hoped to persuade Suffolk County Council to do more in this project. Another project in which the company was interested was the Westerfield Local Development Plan, which could lead to the provision of parking space at this station.

NXEA had also submitted to Waveney District Council and Suffolk County Council a plan of what they wanted Beccles station to look like when the loop was installed.

Our speaker said that the NXEA franchise had a further two-and-a-half years to run and could possibly be extended for a further two years. They needed to look at innovations during that period.

Asked about any plans to install ticket machines at Woodbridge and Saxmundham stations, in particular, Mr Steward said that this was a possibility but that problems with possible vandalism would need to be overcome.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The Public Meeting was followed by the 2009 ESTA AGM, when the officers reported on the Association's work over the previous 12 months.

The Treasurer reported a balance of £1998.35 on April 5th, after allowing for £254 earmarked for 100 Club prizes. Expenditure had included £221.61 on a portable display board, which was used in some of our anniversary exhibitions and will be available for use in future displays at events, meetings etc. We had also spent more on printing of leaflets, survey forms and similar items.

Membership stood at 419, of whom 16 were corporate members. Elections were as follows:

Chairman: Trevor Garrod (Lowestoft); Vice-Chairman: Peter Cannon (Leiston); Secretary: Rod Lock (Oulton Broad); Treasurer and Membership Secretary: Alan Williams (Thurlton); Committee: Mike Farahar (Martlesham Heath); Val Pizzey (Wickham Market); Helen Armstrong (Framlingham); David Adams (Saxmundham); Benita Jackson (Halesworth); Alan Holloway (Ringsfield); Margaret Swanenburg (Benhall Green); Chris Boon (Oulton Broad); Brenda Roberts (Wenhaston). In addition, Bryan Hall represents Suffolk Coastal District Council; Mr.S.J.Williams Ipswich Borough Council; Ben Porter Waveney District Council; Ken Howe Saxmundham Town Council and M Doherty and ID Smith Beccles Town Council.

We can co-opt up to three additional committee members. The committee meets during the evening of the last Wednesday of January, March, May, July, September and November, at Saxmundham station. Please contact Trevor Garrod or Rod Lock if you are interested in being co-opted.

WINNERS in the 100 Club Draw made at the AGM were: Mrs Rackham of Woodbridge, £45; Mr Williams of Thurlton, £30. Ms Nason, Laxfield £20 and Mr Hansford, Oulton Broad, £15. To join this quarterly draw, please send £12 for the year to our Treasurer.

WELCOME BACK TO OPEN-TOP BUS

From July 18th till August 29th, the open-top bus is again running on Thursdays and Saturdays from Woodbridge rail station out to Sutton Hoo, also serving a dozen other stops in Woodbridge and Melton.

ESTA has sponsored this service to the tune of £50, and we hope members will use it and encourage others to do so.

A timetable leaflet is enclosed. Let our Secretary know if you can make use of more. The leaflet has also been distributed by the East Anglian Branch of Railfuture (to which ESTA is affiliated) to all its members.

WOODBIDGE AREA BUS REORGANISATION

On June 25th we received from Suffolk County Council copies of the revised timetables for bus services 71 (Woodbridge to Orford) and 165 (Ipswich to Leiston via Snape).

There are essentially six workings each way, Monday to Saturday, and apart from catering for local people they also allow day trips to such interesting places as Orford and Snape.

Train connections at Woodbridge and Melton stations are also shown in the timetable and we understand that these buses will use the new shelter next to Woodbridge station.

"SUFFOLK LINKS - WILFORD AREA"

This is the name with which Suffolk County Council is marketing the new Demand Responsive Transport system in the area between the Deben estuary, Woodbridge, Sudbourne, Orford and the Ore estuary/coast.

The new bus service started on July 6th and is available from 07.00 to 19.00 Monday to Saturday. To book a journey, you must phone up to a week in advance on 0845-604 1802 and the lines are open from 08.00 to 18.00 Monday to Friday.

The demand-responsive bus will make connections with other buses, and with trains at Woodbridge and Melton stations, where possible; and will otherwise provide an end-to-end journey within its defined operating area.

There is already a demand-responsive bus service in the Leiston area on Sundays; but this is probably the first such weekday service in our area.

We shall be pleased to hear from ESTA members who use it. Please send your experiences - both positive and negative - to our Secretary.

ESTA is pleased to work with GRYFF COMPUTING of Saxmundham, who design this bulletin and send it out electronically. They also offer a full range of IT services. Contact David Adams on 01728- 603311 or visit www.gryff.co.uk

We are also pleased to work with BLYTHWEB Ltd of Wenhaston, who maintain our website and offer a wide range of IT services. Phone Tim or Eileen Heaps on 01502-478712 or log on to www.blythweb.net

TRAVEL CANNON LTD, Station House, Station Approach, Saxmundham, on 01728-604600 offer a full range of foreign travel facilities by rail, sea and air and are open Monday - Friday in normal office hours plus Saturday mornings.

"TRY THE TRAIN.. .TRY THE BUS"

Can you help distribute ESTA's new leaflet on public transport in the Saxmundham, Leiston and Aldeburgh area?

It can be left in public places, shops, cafes etc, and also put through letter-boxes.

Please contact Trevor Garrod if you can help.

AN ANNIVERSARY EVERY YEAR? There is a railway in the Italian Alps where the local users' association holds a celebration every year, at a different place each year, to mark its birthday. We could do the same each year, on or about June 1st. Your committee will be pleased to consider ideas and suggestions.

LAST BUT NOT AT ALL LEAST...

A two-hourly through train between Lowestoft and London or an hourly service between Lowestoft and Ipswich? This is the choice being put in a consultation paper issued by National Express East Anglia.

ESTA's committee were due to consider our detailed response on July 29th; and are grateful to several members who had sent in comments, plus non-members who responded to an item on our website. We shall not issue our final comments until August 20th, and so our secretary would be pleased to receive further comments in writing by then.

You can also send your views direct to Jonathan Denby, Head of Corporate Affairs, National Express East Anglia, Oliver's Yard, 55 City Road, London, EC1V 1HQ. The final decision will be made by the Secretary of State for Transport, Lord Adonis, and so you could also write to him at Great Minster House, 76 Marsham Street London SW1P 4DR.

NXEA contend that, with the arrival of additional electric trains, they must concentrate diesels north of Ipswich. The extra diesel capacity would be used to introduce an hourly Ipswich - Saxmundham service from December 2010 and an hourly Ipswich - Lowestoft service from December 2012. However, this strategy assumes that Beccles loop is constructed, and there is no guarantee that it will be. Nor is there any guarantee that all our services are to be provided by 3-car class 170 diesel multiple units. Indeed, NXEA are hinting that many of our services would be provided by two-car class 156 or single-car class 153 units, which will by then be 20 years old at least.

There is also no guarantee that there will be a lift at Ipswich station, and there are no plans to increase the capacity of this station - so changing trains there at busy times could be a disincentive to customers travelling through to London. A survey in March 2007 showed 65% of passengers on the 06.44 ex Lowestoft were going through to London as were 74% on the 10.58 and 47% on the 16.58. NXEA's consultation document gives no indication of any recent market research by themselves into what East Suffolk passengers to and from London want.

Of course, the prospect of an hourly service on our line is a tempting one, especially if Beccles loop and Ipswich lift are guaranteed; but NXEA's proposals currently are hedged with too many "if" and "buts" to inspire confidence. We are endeavouring to do further research. Deadline for submissions to NXEA and the Secretary of State is September 11th.

NEXT BULLETIN: Deadline is September 10th, for publication in October. Please send contributions to Trevor Garrod (trevorgarrod2000@yahoo.co.uk).