

2019 COMMERCIAL REPORT

2019, what a year! The early part of 2019 saw the culmination of the project, which effectively began in 2010, to overhaul 45596 and operate the engine on the main line once again. That objective was achieved on 9 February when *Bahamas* tackled the S&C once again since 1994, a 25-year absence. This time the train promoted by the KWVR, sold out in 3 hours – a feat that not even the KWVRS trip with *Flying Scotsman* achieved! – so much so that a second trip, again full, ran to Carlisle and back the following Saturday (16 February).

The following month (29 March) saw the locomotive formally ‘commissioned’ by Sir Peter Hendy, Network Rail’s Chairman, and the formal end of the £1m+ project supported by the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF).

Bahamas then hauled a further five trains in 2019 reaching destinations such as Worcester, Hereford, Gloucester and York operating tours promoted by the Railway Touring Company (operated by West Coast Railway Company) or Vintage Trains Limited. Altogether Carlisle was the destination three times in 2019 and one in 2020.

So far, including the pre-Covid S&C trip on 22 February 2020 *Bahamas* has hauled just 8 trains which is around the target that we set ourselves for 2019. Unfortunately, however several of these trips have resulted from marketing on our part rather than from requests to use the loco. The most disappointing thing last year was that despite having received active support from the top echelons of Network Rail and the Bahamas’ High Commissioner’s Office in London and also having lined up both National and International support, it did not prove possible to run the Charity Train that we wanted to run in aid of the Bahamas Hurricane Disaster Fund. Whilst the train itself might not have generated significant funds to aid the work in the Islands, it was felt that with National exposure it would have highlighted the need and hence brought awareness to a larger audience.

Prior to these trips a new range of ‘Bahamas-related’ merchandise was researched and ordered and the items proved of interest to tour passengers and to visitors to Ingrow. In addition some supporting leaflets were produced outlining not only a brief history of the engine but also ways to help the Society and our activities. A new sales order form was also produced to accompany the marketing leaflet as was a ‘Thank You for travelling leaflet’ which gives free admission to Rail Story. Also published was an 84-page book about *Bahamas* produced by Silver Link/Mortons Books.

45596’s footplate hosted HRH Prince Edward the Duke of Kent on 31 May whilst the following day *Nunlow* and the ‘Coal Tank’ were guest engines at Hope Cement Works.

In addition to marketing the BLS on 45596 tours, we also attended various events during the year including the Warley National Model Railway Show at the NEC in support of our sponsorship of the Rail Cameramen Exhibition. We are also one of the sponsors of the Young Railway Photographer of the year Competition which was launched there.

I am aware of concerns from some members that loco hire income will, at the present rate of 45596’s use, be insufficient to produce funds for its next overhaul. We have actually assessed how much is needed given that, as part of our commitment to the NLHF five or so years ago it was agreed that we would ringfence c£90k of the Blast Appeal monies to go partway towards the engine’s maintenance and next overhaul. We feel that with careful and prudent financial management we will have sufficient funds when that day comes although that will not stop us continuing to seek further income to cushion any unexpected need for additional funds. In addition, we have benefited

from several legacies and other substantial gifts which have helped us build up substantial 'restricted' funds for the next overhaul of *Bahamas*.

We continue to seek regular donations via the 'Friends of 45596' and our other fundraising schemes but we understand the difficult environment we are all facing at the moment and so expectations are not high. However, we will continue to explore all options with vigour. The recent grant of £61,500 from the NLHF is a case in point given that we felt we needed support for a specific aspect of our business; it is felt that that is the right method rather than adopt a scatter-gun approach to fund raising.

I cannot end this without touching briefly on the Covid-19 crisis which, as with other businesses, will affect what we do for months to come. The 'break' gave us an opportunity to take stock and to develop some new ideas which, thankfully, seem to have found favour. We have two main income flows which from a commercial point of view we need to target: museum and loco hire revenue. We will continue to prioritise these.

We continue to maintain excellent relationships with the railway Press and I must acknowledge the support they give us and will continue to develop appropriate commercial relationships in order to ensure, as best as we can, the maintenance of the museum, our education and community work, and the use of 45596 on the main line and on heritage lines. There is considerable competition for work for private-owner engines not having a formal commercial relationship with any of the leading tour operators given that 'new' locos continue to appear after overhaul. However, all being well but dependent on social distancing issues etc. we expect 45596 to be fairly active during the spring and late summer months in 2021

Finally I'd like to thank all colleagues, friends, our staff and anyone who has assisted in any way the commercial activities of our business since the last AGM.

John Hillier

September 2020