

## COMMERCIAL REPORT - AGM. 31 OCTOBER 2021

Convention requires that due to the timing of the AGM not only should I report on activities in 2020 but bring the story up to date and also have a vision for the year ahead. Members will recall that, against all the odds, in 2020 I was successful in arranging for *Bahamas* to visit the Mid Hants Railway in the Autumn of last year in what proved to be, a hugely successful Gala and the first visit of 45596 to a heritage railway since its most recent overhaul. I was also able to obtain a grant of £61,500 from the National Lottery Heritage Fund which enabled our business to remain viable during 2020 given the absence of normal income from museum admission and locomotive hire. In September last year *Bahamas* was used for a photographic charter although the fee was well below what is the norm given that hire fees charged are passed directly on to the photographers hiring the locomotive.

Thankfully we were able to furlough our staff thanks to the support we were able to get from various sources. I was grateful to them for accepting the changes to their contractual arrangements during such a difficult period for them as well as the Company.

We entered 2021 full of optimism and hope that we would return to a degree of normality and once again receive income from museum admissions supplemented by revenue from operating 45596. I was able to conclude negotiations for *Bahamas* to haul a series of trains for Tyseley-based Vintage Trains as well as with tour promoter Steam Dreams for some prestigious trips which would give *Bahamas* an opportunity to operate out of London for the first time in our ownership.

In the event additional restrictions imposed by the Government meant that 45596's return to Tyseley was cancelled but at short notice I was able to arrange for the locomotive to visit the Nene Valley Railway in August prior to its first scheduled trip to London for Steam Dreams. This work for the locomotive was the result of the excellent contacts that I had developed and maintained with several potential hirers of *Bahamas* over several years.

However, arrangements can rarely be taken for granted in this business and a shortage of available locomotives in the south resulted in an unexpected request from the Railway Touring Company for 45596 in July. This required some quick thinking and significant additional planning plus some difficult negotiations in order to both help RTC out whilst at the same time keeping our commitment to let Steam Dreams use *Bahamas* on its first London departure since the 1960s.

I was able to arrange for the High Commissioner from the Bahamas Islands and some colleagues from his Office in London to join us on that train which travelled from London Paddington to Salisbury and Southampton and back. As others will I am sure testify the unexpected work that we were able to undertake for both SD and RTC either side of the trip to the NVR took 45596 to destinations as far apart as Plymouth, Weymouth, the Kent Coast resort, the Welsh Marches and York. Had Covid not intervened then we would not have been able to do this work. Wherever it went the locomotive and its loco and on-train marketing support teams received high praise.

I need to record my sincere thanks to all who helped facilitate our most adventurous and challenging period of work ever and in particular to my long-suffering wife for her understanding given the amount of work that had to go on behind the scenes without which 45596's wheels would not have turned. Others will have had the same support from family, friends and employers. Few outside the Company appreciate the special set of challenges that we face as a voluntary group running and operating main-line steam whilst also managing an Accredited Museum.

During the year *Bahamas* was hired to feature in the film "The Railway Children Return" which hits the screens next year – its trailer was released this week – and this is likely to prove its worth – excuse the play on words - in publicity for many years ahead.

On a broader front the Society has been one of the sponsors for the Young Railway Photographer of the Year Competition, entries for which must be in by today. I am intimately involved with this which culminates in an Awards Night to be held at the NRM next February. This will be accompanied by a lengthy exhibition at the NRM where the support of the YRPOTY's sponsors will be acknowledged. I would like to acknowledge the support of Network Rail, the NRM, Jessops Limited, Bauer Media, Time Line Events in responding positively to my request for help to sponsor this prestigious event, the first of its kind, and in particular Mortons Media who offered to host all the entries on a specially designed web site. We continue to work with Mortons on a number of other on-going projects. A special word of thanks is due to Peter Townsend from Silver Link Publishing for working closely with me on several print-based projects for the Company.

Once again with Peter Skellon I co-ordinated the work necessary to produce our acclaimed Vintage Steam Calendar but I was saved the task of seeking FOC prizes for our Annual Raffle, another Covid-casualty.

So, having mentioned 2022 briefly its time to consider the future and in particular my role as a Director. I made it known several months ago that I felt it wrong for anyone to continue as a Director beyond 75 years of age and that I would reflect on this during the year given that I reach 75 next January. Whilst I genuinely believe that I still have a lot to offer the Company and Society I also feel that having successfully achieved all the projects initiated, business improvements and personal goals that I set myself when I was asked to re-join the Board in August 2010 it is time to step down and I propose doing that in January.

Our business now is totally different from that which I found almost 12 years ago but it still faces significant challenges in the years ahead. I sincerely hope that there will be opportunities for my advice, experience and wide contact base to be put to good use in the months ahead although unfortunately not as a Director of the Company. I have a number of on-going projects which will be of benefit to the BLS/BLT as the years roll on.

It's hard to believe that of the current Board colleagues I am the longest serving Member of the Society and the only person who was a member of the original Board when the Company was set up in the late 1960s. I have gained a lot of personal satisfaction from either initiating or being involved with so many things for the Society and for the Movement throughout that time.

I would like to conclude by wishing the Society and Company, its Officials and Members my very best wishes for the future. I will continue to have a watchful eye and very close interest in something that has been an integral part of my life for 55 years or so.

John Hillier.  
October 2021.