

# 'Black Five' and tramway win major accolades at HRA Awards

March 23, 2022



The restoration of the oldest surviving 'Black Five', Seaton Tramway and a young Kent and East Sussex Railway volunteer all took away top honours at the Heritage Railway Association annual awards.

Nearly 250 heritage railway volunteers and staff from right across the UK came together in Birmingham on Saturday, March 19 for the return of the HRA Annual Awards evening. The event was being held for the first time since the coronavirus pandemic forced the awards to go online. The evening was hosted by Ffestiniog and Welsh Highland Railways General Manager Paul Lewin with guest speaker Tim Dunn, of railway documentary fame.

The awards saw a record-breaking number of entries with more than 75 submissions covering almost every element of railway preservation in the UK. For the first time the event was sponsored by Hallett Oils. Originally founded by industry-renowned chemist and entrepreneur Richard Hallett, the Hallett name has become recognisable the world over with specialists, industrialists and hobbyists alike, and is considered the authority in steam lubrication. In 2019, Aztec Oils acquired the prestigious Hallett Steam Oils brand and are proud to continue its legacy by forever maintaining the standards and quality of Hallett's original formulations. Hallett Oils are now stocked and sold around the world, powering steam engines as far afield

as New Zealand and Australia.

The Morgan Award for Preservation, which recognises rolling stock restoration, was handed to the Great Central Railway-based Quorn Wagon and Wagon Group. The 17-wagon box van train completed by the team, which is dedicated to non-passenger rolling stock, saw them pick up the trophy. The group had finished as runners up in the same category during 2021 but accomplishing the restoration of a full train impressed the judges this year.

The Coiley Locomotive Engineering Award, sponsored by Morris Lubricants, was presented to the Strathspey Railway for their restoration of London Midland and Scottish Railway 'Black Five' No. 5025. The sheer scale of the work involved to return the 1934-built locomotive to original condition impressed judges and saw the '5MT' take the title.

The hotly contested title of 'Outstanding Visitor Attraction', sponsored by Hallett Oils, was this year taken by Seaton Tramway. The 2ft 9in gauge tramway's entry demonstrated the huge amount of digital work that has been carried out as well as a real attention to detail in customer satisfaction.

In the HRA Award for Diesel Locomotion, the Isle of Wight Steam Railway's transformation of pioneering 1920s Drewry railcar No. 2 swept aside the other contestants to claim the trophy. The judges were impressed by the return of a vehicle, that many had forgotten even existed, to first class condition by the line. The level of research carried out to ensure passengers gain an accurate idea of what traveling in this pioneering diesel vehicle during its heyday was like, also attracted praise.

The shortlist for the Lord Faulkner Young Volunteer Award had no fewer than 11 names on it. But 25-year-old Kent and East Sussex Railway volunteer fireman and guard Sarah Tagart pipped all of the others to take the trophy. As well as her operational duties, Sarah was responsible for the recruitment of a record-breaking number of new volunteers at the Tenterden-based line.

Heritage Railway Association Chief Executive, Steve Oates, said: "We had a record-breaking number of entries this year, and the Young Volunteer Award was one of the most hotly contested of all. I'm sure the judges would have given all 11 an award if they could, but Sarah's work really shone, and it's terrific that she took the top prize."

Young people also triumphed in the Most Innovative Fundraising Idea category, sponsored by Hallett Oils. Teenagers and Downs Light Railway volunteers Thomas and Lucy Isherwood, teenagers set about fundraising for the miniature railway during the coronavirus pandemic and managed to turn their target of raising £2,000 into £50,000 of funding for the line.

The HRA Award for Environmental Innovation, sponsored by Direct Track Solutions, was won by the Bure Valley Railway. The 15in gauge railway has been taking a pioneering role in trials of biomass blended fuel to replace traditional coal and has also adopted a raft of other initiatives in an effort to prove that steam railways can respond to ever increasing concerns about the environment.

There were so many entries for the HRA Award for Communications, sponsored by Wrigleys Solicitors, that it had to be split into internal and external categories. In the internal competition, the West Somerset

Railway Association were triumphant for their publication *West Somerset Railway Journal*.

The East Lancashire Railway took the award for external communications back to Bury after judges recognised the railways efforts in transforming its digital presence to better capture the heritage nature of the line. Their success in measuring the impact that the changes made to the whole business were particularly highlighted.

The Cholsey and Wallingford Railway were the standout winners in the HRA Award for Small Groups, sponsored by Allelys Heavy Haulage. The railway attracted record numbers of visitors even in the face of a curtailed operating season due to the coronavirus pandemic. It also completed the award-winning reconstruction of the Maidenhead canopy.

In the HRA Award for Large Groups, also sponsored by Allelys Heavy Haulage, the Bodmin and Wenford Railway won for its work to transform its business operations. The line totally revised its marketing operations to reduce costs, changed its catering operations and moved to pre-booked ticket sales. The changes brought a bumper 55,000 visitors to the railway.

The HRA Chairman's Special Award was awarded to Railway Vehicle Preservations Ltd for the rebuild of London and North Eastern Railway 'beavertail' observation saloon back to its 1937 condition. The judging panel felt that the restoration of such a historically important carriage deserved special credit and that the Chairman's Special Award was the best way to show that.

To mark 70 years of preservation, the Talyllyn Railway was given the Manisty Award for Excellence. The most prestigious award given by the HRA, the accolade was presented to honour the enormous contribution that the Welsh narrow gauge line has made to the whole heritage railway sector and the inspiration it has provided to others for seven decades.

Steve Oates concluded: "This awards event means a huge amount to the heritage rail sector. It's our chance to celebrate the railways and individuals who have gone above and beyond to deliver the quality, experience, ingenuity and passion that heritage railways depend upon. It's also been a great opportunity to look back to the birth of heritage rail and take new inspiration from the massive success that the Talyllyn spearheaded all those years ago.

"After another really tough 12-months, not just for heritage railways but for the whole country, it's been immensely satisfying to see and hear what a fantastic job volunteers and staff across the industry have been doing. It fills me with pride and with optimism that we will overcome whatever challenges face us next."