

Heritage Railway Association goes virtual for 2021 awards show

April 28, 2021



Lockdown restrictions meant the Heritage Railway Association's annual awards event went on-line for 2021, with a simultaneous broadcast on Facebook and You Tube on the afternoon of 28th April. The show featured two new award categories – Most Innovative Fundraising Idea – reflecting the extraordinary circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic, and its impact on heritage rail – and Diesel Locomotion, acknowledging the importance of diesel power in railway history. The event also featured awards presented by the heritage rail magazine editors.

The HRA Awards recognise a wide range of achievements and distinctions across the entire heritage railway industry, and the awards acknowledge individuals and institutions as well as railways, tramways and cliff railways. In spite of the overwhelming impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, several categories saw a record number of submissions and shortlisted entrants.

The Lord Faulkner Award for the Young Volunteer of the Year recognises the crucial importance of succession generations in securing the future of heritage rail, and acknowledges a distinguished contribution made by one or more young volunteers, under the age of 26. The winner was Oliver Edwards, of the Welshpool & Llanfair Light Railway. Runners-up were the Severn Valley Railway's Tom Mills and

Michael Abbott, from the Somerset & Dorset Railway Heritage Trust.

The Morgan Award for Preservation was won by the Mid Suffolk Light Railway, for their Shredded Wheat locomotive. Runners-up were the Midland & Great Northern Joint Railway Society, for their restoration of GNR/M&GN Third 129, Great Central Railway (Quorn Wagon & Wagon), for their restoration of three containers, and the Railway Preservation Society of Ireland for their Guinness Grain Van 504.

The Mid-Hants Railway's Watercress Line film unit won the Award for External Communications.

The runners-up were the Didcot Railway Centre, for their marketing communications; Swanage Railway's 'Save Our Service' film-makers; the Ffestiniog & Welsh Highland Railway's media and communications department, and the Ravenglass and Eskdale Railway Preservation Society's 60-year celebration book 'It's Still a Lot of Fun!'.

In the Internal Communications category, the award was taken by the Talylllyn Railway, for their Control Centre public on-line subscription service. Close behind as runners-up were the Midland and Great Northern Joint Railway Society, for their Summer/Autumn issue of 'Joint Line'; the Great

Western Society for the Great Western Echo magazine; Bluebell Railway for The Bluebell Times, and the Welshpool & Llanfair Light Railway for 'The Earl' communication to working members.

In spite of pandemic restrictions, the UK heritage rail sector has taken every opportunity, however limited, to engage and enthuse the paying public, and competition in the Outstanding Visitor Attraction category was strong. The Dartmouth Steam Railway took the trophy, placing the Lynton & Lynmouth Cliff Railway, Didcot Railway Centre, the Seaton Tramway and the Statfold Barn Railway as runners-up.

The new award for Most Innovative Fundraising Idea saw five contenders, with the Seaton Tramway's Tramathon Live 2020 as the winner, and the Talylllyn Railway's Virtual Visit Appeal, the Mid-Hants Railway and Bahamas Locomotive Society's Autumn Gala, and Bluebell Railway's 'Steam Returns to Bluebell Railway' film as runners-up.

The Coiley Award is presented to an HRA member who has completed an outstanding engineering project in the field of locomotive overhaul, restoration or preservation. Top honour for 2021 went to the Ffestiniog & Welsh Highland Railway for their restoration of the Large England locomotive Welsh Pony, with the Lincolnshire Coast Light Railway's Skeggy Simplex, and the Tanfield Railway's 1904 Andrew Barclay Horden as runners-up.

The HRA Award for Small Groups drew seven nominations, with the trophy going to the Downs Light Railway Trust for their achievements with youth engagement. Runners-up were Southern Electric Traction Group CIC, for 4VEP No 3417; Hull and Barnsley Railway Stock Fund, for their move to Hull College; Tarka Valley Railway CIO for Steaming Ahead, the Bahamas Locomotive Society for Steve Allsop's 50 years' service; East Somerset Railway for their platform, museum and outreach project; and Great Central Railway for the Quorn Wagon and Wagon Group.

The HRA Annual Award (Large Groups) was won by the Lynton & Lynmouth Cliff Railway, for their Top

Wheel installation. The Isle of Wight Steam Railway platform teams, the Swanage Railway's social media team, and the Dartmouth Steam Railway & Riverboat Company were the runners-up.

The last HRA award of the show was the new Diesel Locomotion Award, where top-of-the-podium place went to the Class 50 Alliance, for 30 years of Class 50 preservation excellence, closely followed by the Mid Suffolk Light Railway, for their Shredded Wheat locomotive, and the Lincolnshire Coast Light Railway for their Skeggy Simplex as runners-up.

The 2021 HRA awards show also saw coverage of the heritage rail sector's magazine awards. The Heritage Railway Magazine Interpretation Award went to the Narrow Gauge Railway Museum at Tywyn Wharf on the Talyllyn Railway. The Rail Express Modern Traction Award was taken by the Engineering Team at Island Line, Isle of Wight, and Ian Smith of the Middleton Railway won The Railway Magazine Lifetime Achievement Award. Steam Railway Magazine's annual readers' poll saw ten nominees, with the Cockerill steam tram 'Lucie' at the North Yorkshire Moors Railway voted winner.

HRA Chief Executive Steve Oates said, 'There was a point where we weren't sure we could have an awards event for 2021. Then there was a point when we wondered whether members, rightly so preoccupied with lockdown issues, would have any enthusiasm for participating. I'm happy to say we were delighted by the huge positive response we saw, with record numbers of entries in several categories.'

Featuring recorded interviews and location footage, the on-line show drew a record audience for an HRA awards event.

'The quality of entries was remarkable, too. Throughout these almost impossible times, the heritage rail sector has not only continued to deliver the highest standards in restoration and preservation, but it's also set new benchmarks for creativity in marketing, in communications, in innovation and sheer ingenuity. Congratulations are due not just to winners and runners-up, but to everyone who submitted an entry. Of all our annual awards events, the 2021 show has been truly special.'

The Awards Show will remain viewable on the Heritage Railway Association's Facebook page and YouTube channel.

Photo credit: Ffestiniog & Welsh Highland Railway (winner of The Coiley Award) for the restoration of the Large England locomotive Welsh Pony.