

# Heritage Railway Association marks 60 years

January 6, 2022



The trade body that supports 200 of Britain's best loved and most characterful railways, plus a variety of rolling stock groups and supporting organisations, is commemorating its 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

January 6 marks 60 years to the day since what is now the Heritage Railway Association met for the first time. A wider celebration of the milestone is set to take place later in the year when coronavirus restrictions in all parts of the UK allow.

Chief Executive of the Heritage Railway Association, Steve Oates, said: "During the 60 years since the creation of the association, our 300 members have achieved what many thought impossible. They have rebuilt routes that had vanished almost entirely, they have rebuilt locomotives and carriages, and they have achieved levels of preservation second-to-none, with everything from Victorian cliff railways to mainline steam and diesel locomotives.

"From its very beginnings, the HRA has been driven by the same passion as its members to maintain, operate and develop railways. The determination has not been dimmed and the Heritage Railway Association is at the forefront of ensuring that sector can continue to flourish for the next 60 years."

The Heritage Railway Association has its roots in two organisations, both dating back to the formative

years of railway preservation and restoration.

The 'Railway Preservation Association' was created in the very early 1960s. The first meeting of the organisation was held on Saturday, 6 January 1962 with Captain Bill Smith as Chairman.

Capt Smith was the first individual to purchase a steam locomotive from British Railways. During 1959 he saved former Great Northern Railway 'J52' Class No. 1247 from scrap and immediately changed the landscape of railway preservation.

After a short time, Captain Peter Manisty took over the chair. He was a leading figure in the creation of the Bluebell Railway, the first complete railway to be purchased from British Railways for preservation.

Under Capt Manisty the organisation became known as the Association of Railway Preservation Societies. Alongside the Bluebell, the founding members included the Festiniog Railway, Midland and Great Northern Railway Society, Middleton Railway, South Devon Railway and the Talylyn Railway alongside the forerunners of what would become the National Railway Museum.

In the 1990s the ARPS merged with the much older Association of Independent Railways, which had been created in the 1930s. It was formed to represent railways that had not been included in the 1923 'big four' grouping of the famous Great Western, London and North Eastern, London Midland and Scottish, and Southern railways.

The two bodies came together to form the Association of Independent Railways and Preservation Societies. The first Chair was legendary railway enthusiast and publisher Ian Allan, who had held the same role for the AIR, with former ARPS Chairman David Morgan becoming Vice Chair of the new organisation.

The AIRPS became the single trade association for the whole sector and grew its sphere of influence while offering more and more advice and support to members.

In 1998 the new organisation was given the more concise name of the Heritage Railway Association. Since then the HRA has responded to the rapidly changing world that members now operate in; working closely with industry regulators and developing links with government while supporting and championing heritage rail widely.

Chairman of the Heritage Railway Association, Brian Simpson, said: "The vision of the great founding members like Captain Smith, Captain Manisty, David Morgan and their counterparts should never be underplayed. The whole of the heritage railway world owes them a debt of gratitude to this day.

"Our challenge is to cherish the preservation ideals of these great men while navigating the ever-increasing complexities of the modern world to ensure that heritage rail can flourish for the next 60 years. Fortunately I think the Heritage Railway Association is in great shape to do just that."

Vice Chairman of the HRA, Chris Price, said: "Celebrating our 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary is a fantastic feat. Now more than ever the Heritage Railway Association is important to the sector. Individually even the bigger railways are relatively small voices in the wider world, but together we make a decent contribution to the economy

of the UK and to its cultural heritage. We need to shout about that.

“We’ve done very well in the past and I believe we’re set up to do even more in the future.”

President of the Heritage Railway Association, Lord Faulkner, said: “From the outset, the organisation has been a force for good in heritage rail. It has helped member railways flourish and represented them everywhere.

“Heritage rail has matured and changed so much over the last 60 years, but the challenges have not gone away. Today the HRA is at the forefront of ensuring that everyone can continue to enjoy travelling on historic railways more than ever.”



*Photo credit: G Lee MRT*