

Train named in memory of 1960s Staffordshire rail accident

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CrossCountry have named a train in memory of those who lost their lives at the tragic level crossing accident which happened in the small Staffordshire village of Hixon in 1968.

The event, which took place last Thursday at Stafford station, saw a CrossCountry train named 'Hixon, 6th January 1968' believed to be the first naming after an incident. Industry partners, Pete Waterman representing the Railway Benefit Fund (RBF) and representatives from the community of Hixon gathered for the commemoration.

Locals have already created their own memorial garden in the village to commemorate those who lost their lives. CrossCountry and Network Rail have used volunteer hours to remove damaged and overgrown trees in the garden as well as helping with the upkeep throughout the year.

A replica naming plate has been presented to the community and displayed in their Memorial Hall (picture to be sent over before event). A final replica name plate provided by Alstom will be presented to Pete Waterman to be auctioned off to raise funds for the RBF, who raise money to help railway men and women that need support.

The Manchester to Euston train which was carrying 300 passengers back in January 1968 collided with a road transporter carrying a 120-tonne transformer over the automatic crossing. The train driver, his assistant, a spare driver and eight passengers died in the crash. The incident launched a thorough enquiry, which saw changes made to level crossings across Britain and the crossing at Hixon was later replaced by a bridge.

CrossCountry have also contributed £3,000 to support the local memorial, which will provide for a new shed for their equipment and support replacing the vandalised window in the adjoining church that overlooks the garden. Network Rail have also matched the contribution, and Avanti West

Coast and North Staffs Community Rail Partnership have added a further £1,500. Train Drivers' union ASLEF have rallied around through their branches, welfare societies and union representatives raising £1,385 towards the project.

Tom Joyner, CrossCountry's Managing Director said, "We are delighted to be able to help the people of Hixon continue their work to remember the tragic events of 1968. Although such incidents are rare, their impact is often felt beyond the railway boundary, so it is especially pleasing to see so many industry colleagues coming together to support this project and the local community."

Rail Minister Chris Heaton-Harris, said, "The naming of this train is an apt tribute to all the individuals, families and community who were affected by the tragic events which unfolded at Hixon. We always prioritise safety across our rail network, to protect passengers and staff, and ensure the lessons are learned from these devastating accidents."

The stained-glass window being made by a local expert from reclaimed glass will contain the British Railways Lion to represent the incident, the RAF roundel for the local base, and the keys of St Peters for the church. An unveiling will happen once the window has been installed.

Photo credit: CrossCountry