

ESTA



News

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Summer 2018

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ACTION AT BECCLES STATION - NOW WHAT ABOUT SAXMUNDHAM?

A few days after Easter, work was completed on the northbound platform at Beccles station. The drainage was put right, a new concrete base was laid and then a smart new shelter erected, matching the one of the southbound platform.

Money from Suffolk County Council enabled the old vandalised shelter to be replaced and thus end a problem that had blighted the station for several years and been constantly raised by ESTA and the Community Rail Partnership.

However, three months after the fire at Saxmundham station, remains of the building are still fenced off and there is nowhere under cover for passengers to sit or read the information boards.

At ESTA's Annual General Meeting on May 12th, a resolution was passed unanimously and sent to Greater Anglia and Network Rail, and copied to the local County Councillor.

In the resolution we called for short term remedial work to start immediately, pending a decision on longer term options, which could involve restoring the remains of the building or its replacement. Over three months after the fire, it is not good enough that passengers cannot read notices on the wall or sit down under cover, for example; and the state of the building gives a bad impression to visitors.

At the end of May one of our members needed to use the help point on the station and found that it was still impossible to use as it was behind the fence. We wrote to Greater Anglia, whose customer care officer assured us on June 1st, "Our Asset Management Director has now requested that the Help Point is relocated to another area within the station. This work should be undertaken within the next few weeks." We are pleased to note that it was in fact done in mid June.

COME TO BECCLES LIDO BY BUS OR TRAIN . ESTA has been pleased to work with Beccles Lido in publicising their offer of a 50p discount on admission for every customer able to show a return train or bus ticket. The heated outdoor swimming pool is a great asset to the town and attracts swimmers from a wide area of Suffolk and Norfolk. It was closed by Waveney District Council but reopened by a charitable trust in 2010. A special laminated poster was produced in May and displayed on our rail station boards and our three new boards at bus stations. We have also urged bus operators to advertise the fact on their vehicles. Beccles Lido will be open every day till September 9th. For more information, log on to www.beccleslido.com or phone 01502-713297.

THE EFFECT OF THE SNOW

This ESTA NEWS is being compiled on warm sunny days in late spring and the "Beast from the East" seems a long way away.

There were no trains running on either of the lines to Lowestoft from February 27th and March 4th and ESTA's Chairman wrote to both Greater Anglia and Network Rail to protest about this situation. Most reasonable people would expect some disruption to services in severe weather, but Network Rail's action in just suspending the regional services was not good enough.

In their reply, Network Rail stated that they would be carrying out a review of their policy in severe weather and so we sent our input to their review. We made five points:

1. There should at least be an emergency timetable on each line.
2. It should be accepted that if at least some trains are running, the risk of snow building up and drifting will be less.
3. The snow plough for East Anglian lines should be based at a more central location than March and checked every autumn.
4. If no service can be run, but buses are operating, train tickets should be immediately valid on the relevant buses.
5. There should be prompt and full information to would-be passengers.

We did, however, also pay tribute to Greater Anglia's front-line staff who were on duty and helpful to passengers. It was also revealed that managers left their offices and helped clear away the snow.

Let us hope that there will be some changes for the better before next winter.

ROD LOCK - FROM SECRETARY TO PRESIDENT

There were 30 of us at The Lady of the Lake, Oulton Broad on Friday June 1st for an evening buffet - ESTA members, the Lock family and representatives of Greater Anglia, the Community Rail Partnership and the East Norfolk Transport Users' Association.

We were there partly because it was the 159th anniversary of the opening in its entirety of the East Suffolk Line, but also as a thank you to Rod Lock who, after 21 years, had stood down as ESTA secretary and who was presented with a Parker pen as a gift.

Rod spoke of his long railway career, which culminated in nine years at the then British Railways Board headquarters in London, when he commuted every day from Oulton Broad.

He had "enjoyed every minute" of ESTA work and drew special attention to the successful campaign to keep Lowestoft station on its central site. This was followed by some amusing stories about people whom he had met on the train during his commuting years.

Rod has now been elected President of the East Suffolk Travellers' Association, following in the illustrious footsteps since 1965 of Lord (Benjamin) Britten, Gerard Fiennes, Jean Fiennes and Albert Godfrey. He will be an active President, continuing to do research and give advice, administer surveys, hold our archives and post out the quarterly ESTA NEWS among other things.

We look forward to his continued input for many more years.

Thanks were also given to Geoffrey Lilley for organising the event at The Lady of the Lake - which will also host our Christmas Lunch on December 15th.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

This year's AGM was held on May 12th in a new venue - the Quay Church at Woodbridge. 35 members were welcomed from a wide area and 6 apologies for absence were recorded..

In his Annual Report the Chairman referred to good news during the past twelve months - a better bus service from Ipswich to Saxmundham, Leiston and Aldeburgh with improved rail connections; and the start of work building the new trains which should be running on local services by the end of 2019. This was balanced by bad news - the almost total withdrawal of bus services to Snape and Tunstall and the suspension of all local train services (except for Felixstowe freight) for six days during severe weather. Mr Garrod thanked all committee members and others who had contributed to the association's work during the past year and said we looked forward to the opportunity to comment on the new train timetable due to start in December next year. He paid tribute to the work done by Rod Lock over 21 years as Secretary but added, "We look forward to his continuing contribution in other ways." He also thanked Peter Roberts and Benita Jackson who had produced and distributed the quarterly Headline News to our notice boards for many years. This work will be continued. The outgoing Treasurer reported a total income of £6646.40 and expenditure of £3805.02, leaving a surplus of £2841.38 and bank balance of £4846.30 (See also later item, Awards to ESTA). Paid up membership was 336 and a further 38 still to renew for this year.

The following were elected:

Chairman: Trevor Garrod, Lowestoft

Vice-Chairman: Peter Coghill, Halesworth

Secretary: Alan Williams, Thurlton

Treasurer & Membership Secretary: Mike Farahar, Martlesham Heath

Committee: David Adams (Saxmundham), Peter Cogar (Woodbridge), Sandra Gage (Ipswich), Geoffrey Lilley (Snape), Nigel Wall (Ipswich), Peter Cannon (Leiston), Rosemary Lewis (Halesworth), Wendy Robinson (Halesworth), John Thompson (Oulton Broad).

Our Constitution enables us to co-opt up to three additional Committee Members, and it will be noted that we currently have none from the towns of Bungay, Southwold, Aldeburgh or Framlingham. Any member interested should contact Trevor Garrod.

In addition, the following were subsequently reappointed by their Councils: Philip Smart (Ipswich Borough), John Fisher (Suffolk Coastal District) and Louise Gooch (Waveney District). John Fisher has also represented Saxmundham Town Council and Nikki Elliot Beccles Town Council.

The report of the Hon Auditor, Mr Peter Meades, was accepted with thanks and he was reappointed.

Thank you to Peter Cogar and David Adams for organising the refreshments.

In the second half we heard a fascinating talk by Mr Brendan Fox, former Editor of the Thomas Cook European Rail Timetable. This book had originated in 1873 as a pocket timetable and by the 1960s was selling as many as 30,000 copies per month. They concentrated on main lines but also included some relevant bus and ferry links, and tried to make it easy to read for travellers to and on the Continent.

The printed edition was now bimonthly, having previously been monthly, and there was also a monthly digital version. Mr Fox said, "The print edition is still relevant, even in the age of the internet. It is easy to use - for last-minute checks customers can also go on line".

He pinpointed three challenges facing the publishers: getting the information; fitting it all into the space; coping with time zones and daylight saving time. Railways in Europe had to connect together and so there was an annual timetable conference.

Open access operators also presented particular challenges. Sometimes their plans did not come to fruition and sometimes competing companies did not want to see their competitors' services advertised. Engineering work could also be a challenge, but it was easier to include in a digital timetable changes due to this.

Turning to developments in recent years, Mr Fox said that the growth of high speed lines was the most significant and had been one reason for a reduction in demand for night trains. However, many high speed trains required compulsory reservations or charged higher fares.

Our speaker advised that the best way to travel around Europe was with a rail-pass, with Interrail (my.interrail.co.uk) offering global, flexible and one-country passes; and that a 15% reduction was often possible if you bought your pass in February or March for a summer holiday. It was also worth researching other tickets. For example, the Czech Republic offered a day ticket for the whole country. The Benelux Pass was also good value for money and off-peak day tickets also included buses. Then it was worth investigating City Passes which often covered an area well beyond the city in which you might be staying.

Finally, Mr Fox referred to the European Rail Timetable, now compiled and published by former Thomas Cook staff, as the most comprehensive source of information on timetables and passes (www.europeanrailtimetable.eu) and, particular for journeys from the UK, The Man in Seat 61 (www.seat61.com).

Our Chairman thanked Mr Fox for a most informative and well illustrated talk and presented him with a copy of ESTA's book "ESTA- The First 50 Years".

"DISCOVER THE BLYTH VALLEY"

What do Jesters at Bungay Castle, Pontins at Pakefield, Aldeburgh Cinema and Ipswich Tourist Information Centre have in common?

They are 4 out of more than 30 outlets which are displaying the 2018 edition of ESTA's leaflet "Discover the Blyth Valley" with its subtitle "by taking the Halesworth Train, Southwold Bus." It can also be obtained from leaflet dispensers in Konect buses and on ESTA station boards.

5000 were printed in April and if you would like some but cannot find any, contact ESTA's Chairman.

We are grateful to Konectbus, the Halesworth Tourism Group and the Halesworth & Blyth Valley Partnership for their help with the financing of this leaflet.

Meanwhile, the new edition of EAST SUFFOLK LINE WALKS, published by the Community Rail Partnership, is due to appear in mid June. It is free and available from libraries and tourist information offices. It can also be ordered (£1.50 p&p) from the Visitor Information Point, Lowestoft Rail Station, Denmark Rd., Lowestoft, NR32.

The Visitor Information Point also has copies of the new guide for the Lowestoft - Norwich Line, again free of charge. This year's guide contains more information about places of interest along the line and events due to take place this summer and autumn.

FOR YOUR DIARY

Sunday July 17th ESTA stall at Woodbridge Regatta

Saturday July 7th ESTA CRUISE DOWN THE RIVER ORWELL FROM IPSWICH TO HARWICH.

departing from the Wet Dock at 14.00 The trip takes three and a half hours - refreshments on the boat which turns round at the mouth of the river. More details a week before we go.

To book, please send a cheque, payable to ESTA, for £26 per person (£23 for concessions) to Trevor Garrod, 15 Clapham Rd South, Lowestoft, NR32 1RQ.

Saturday September 8th - ESTA RAIL TRIP TO SHERINGHAM

A one-day Anglia Plus ticket costs £19 (with 30% off if you have a Railcard) and is ideal for a trip of this type. We recommend you buy one, unless you live close enough to Sheringham so that a day return is cheaper. We recommend you catch the 09.17 from Ipswich to Lowestoft, changing to the 10.57 to Norwich and then 11.45 to Sheringham. On the way back you could leave Sheringham at 15.45, changing at Norwich and Lowestoft and arriving in Ipswich at 19.36. If you live in Ipswich, you could catch a train twice an hour up the main line to Norwich. The Anglia Plus gives you lots of flexibility on a Saturday. We propose to catch the 13.50 steam train from Sheringham to Holt and return to Sheringham at 15.06. If there are enough of us, we should be able to obtain a group reduction. You do not have to send any money to ESTA for this trip - just let our Chairman know that you are coming. You can write to him - Trevor Garrod, 15 Clapham Rd South, Lowestoft, NR32 1RQ or email chairman @ eastsuffolktravel.org.uk He will send further details nearer the date.

Saturday/Sunday September 22nd/23rd ESTA stall at East Anglia Transport Museum Trolleybus Event

Saturday October 6th ESTA AUTUMN PUBLIC MEETING in the URC Church, Quay Street, Halesworth. Guest speaker: Mr Alan Neville, Customer Engagement Manager, Greater Anglia.

October will also be ESTA Survey Month. The main aims of our survey this year will be to compare the situation on local trains and bus services and facilities with what it was in 2017 (including punctuality and reliability); and to identify experiences on a particular journey that would persuade or dissuade people from making that journey again. This could include bus stop / station facilities, staff attitude etc.

Questionnaires will be available on our website and will be sent out with the next ESTA NEWS.

Saturday December 15th ESTA Christmas Lunch, The Lady of the Lake, Bridge Rd., Oulton Broad. Details will be sent out with our September issue.

MEANWHILE, NORTH OF THE BORDER

Our sister organisation the East Norfolk Transport Users' Association (www.entua.org.uk) is holding its AGM and Public Open Meeting on Thursday 16th August from 14.00 at Christchurch, Deneside, Great Yarmouth. The venue is a few minutes' walk south from Market Gates bus station, opposite St Georges Theatre.

ESTA members will be welcome - and our interests do coincide on matters such as train services to Norwich, bus links along the coast and the buses between Great Yarmouth, Beccles and Bungay.

The organisers state: "Everyone is welcome! Representatives of the local bus and rail operators have been invited to do a presentation of their current and forthcoming services and then take questions, ideas, complaints or suggestions from those attending."

AWARDS TO ESTA

Our association received £312 from the Waitrose Community Fund following donations by customers during the winter. ESTA Vice-Chairman Peter Coghill was presented with this welcome cheque at the Saxmundham store in early May, and we shall put it to good use.

ESTA also received a cheque for £2500 from the former National Council on Inland Transport, which has been disbanded. Ours was one of 12 organisations to which such awards were given. We have agreed to use this money for specific projects, principally concerning publicity. A small amount of it, for example, has been spent on printing and distributing the 2018 edition of our "Discover the Blyth Valley" leaflet.

ESTA 100 CLUB

Awards such as these help us to keep subscriptions at a reasonable level. So does the ESTA 100 Club, which is administered by our Secretary, Alan Williams. It is drawn four times a year, with up to five cash prizes each time. To join it, you just have to send a £12 cheque (payable to ESTA) to Alan at 51 Links Way, Thurlton, Norfolk, NR14 6RF. The first draw of 2018 was made at the AGM on May 12th when the winners were: 131 Ronald Paul (Lowestoft), 133 Simon Ives (Friston), 102 Rod Lock (Oulton Broad), 127 Mrs Pinkney (Lowestoft) and 156 Peter Crane (London).

BUS DEVELOPMENTS

BACT BUS SERVICE - Since April 24th, Beccles rail station has been served twice a day by a Community Bus from Bungay. It leaves Hillside Road East at 07.04 and arrives at Beccles station at 07.38 before arriving back in Bungay at 08.31. An early evening trip leaves at 17.04 to reach Beccles station at 17.38 from where it departs again at 18.02. Initially the service is free and more information is available at www.bactcommunitytransport.org.uk or phone 01986 896896.

COASTAL CLIPPER - We would have liked to see a through bus service again from Southwold to Great Yarmouth via Kessingland and Lowestoft and possibly beyond to Caister and Winterton.

However, First Eastern Counties is offering the next best thing, with services 99 and 1/1A marketed as "Coastal Clipper" and interchange between them at Lowestoft Bus Station. Service 99 also calls at Lowestoft rail station.

Through ticketing is possible as a YarLow ticket at £6.50 (£4.30 for young people up to 19 and £10 for a group of up to five) gives unlimited travel all day along the coast as far north as Winterton.

MONTHLY STRADBROKE - LAXFIELD - SWEFFLING - IPSWICH SERVICE

Our member Mr R J Creed reports that several Parish Councils have been considering how to keep this service going and Sweffling Parish Council has already made a payment to ensure that the trip was operated in May. More publicity is also needed in local village magazines and at roadside bus stops.

A RAIL TICKET TO "LOWESTOFT BUSES" OR "IPSWICH BUSES?"

Did you know that you could buy a train ticket to "Lowestoft Buses" or indeed a similar ticket to "Ipswich Buses", "Colchester Buses" and indeed to nearly 20 other towns and cities in East Anglia? This is part of the "PlusBus" scheme which enables you to reach your final destination all on one ticket.

In the case of Lowestoft it costs an extra £3.30 (£2.20 with a Railcard) and it is valid for onward bus journeys as far as Gunton (for Pleasurewood Hills), Kessingland (for Africa Alive) and Carlton Colville (for the East Anglia Transport Museum, eatransportmuseum.co.uk).

Indeed, the 99 bus stops outside Africa Alive and the X2, X21, X22 and 103 all stop at, or near, the Transport Museum. So why not enjoy a car-free day out (or park at your local station) at one of these popular attractions.

A similar add-on at Ipswich will take you to St Augustines, for the Ipswich Transport Museum (www.ipswichtransportmuseum.co.uk) or perhaps to one of the town's attractive parks.

MAINLINE MATTERS

Mistakes, Lessons learnt and Questions for Greater Anglia Management

Just wonder to start with if readers had any comment on my report in the previous issue on the tragic subject of suicides on the Liverpool St to Norwich mainline? There were 32 in 2017. Welcome any views on action before we raise again with Greater Anglia.

Back to railway management. This story in April was my fault being under the wrong impression the service from Liverpool St which connects with the East Suffolk Line was an hourly service. It is not of course, during the afternoon. If you miss the 1400 the next fast one is 1600 both of whom get you to Melton having changed at Ipswich in 1hr 36 mins. OK, there's a train from LST at 1430 but it's a stopper and the journey takes 1hr 52 mins. My mistake was to take the 1500 forgetting this gap. When I got to Ipswich there was over an hour to wait till the 1717 service to Melton.

How about a bus? I asked at Ipswich customer services but was told there was no coordinated information but their view was that it would not get me to Melton any quicker. So I sat down in one of those comfortable black leather services having got a cup of tea and slice of cake for £5.85 (is that just me who thinks that's dear? On a minimum wage it would take at least 45 mins to earn that).

Now for one of those rays of sunshine that's worth acknowledging. I'd been speaking at the customer service desk to Marshall and he later came over to me having worked out the service to the Ipswich Bus Station and when the next Route 65 would get to Melton. How good of him to do this and it confirmed his earlier view that there was little or no benefit. Thank you Marshall! One thought: For all those who miss the Lowestoft connection it might be good to have a notice which tells you that.

Bottom line on this point. Why can't an 'hourly service' deliver what it says on the tin? What would be involved to provide a 15:00 connecting service? In the meantime highlight the presence of the gap.

One more lesson on 8th May when the 14:13 to Ipswich did not show up. I called the information line on the station and spoke to a helpful call centre operator in Mumbai who said the train had been cancelled and there would be an hour to wait till the next one i.e. 15:13. Here is the lesson – check the internet before leaving home. BUT when would they know the facts? If you have to be in London at particular time, you need the bad news earlier than the incident. Just think what the belt and braces approach costs travellers in time i.e. **always leave a train in hand**. Is that the rule in the rest of Europe?

Fine to get your journey paid for when it's over an hour delay but think of the opportunity cost for you. And more questions, how much does Greater Anglia have to pay out each year on delays? What is the trend? How does that compare with other TOCs and when it is Network Rail's responsibility do they get compensated? Who can answer these questions?

Happy travelling
Simon Barrow

Editor's Note:

Members' input on the issues raised in this article will be very welcome - especially as Trevor Garrod and Alan Williams have a meeting with one of Greater Anglia's managers on June 27th, when these will be among the items on the agenda.

The problem encountered by Simon with a mid-afternoon onward connection along the East Suffolk Line results from a slot reserved for a Sizewell train that very rarely runs. Our correspondence with Greater Anglia on this matter was reported in ESTA News 143 and 144, when an improvement was partly promised in 2019/20.

TG.



A view of Rod Lock's 'retirement' buffet at The Lady of the Lake, Oulton Broad on June 1st.
Rod is regaling the gathered with anecdotes from his past.

NEXT ESTA NEWS will be published in September. Please send material to Trevor Garrod, editor @ eastsuffolktravel.org.uk by August 31st.