

<http://www.mrug.org.uk>

21st July 2019

Melksham rail user group

Over the last month, the Melksham Rail User Group's volunteers have attended and assisted with ...

Shaw and Whitley Fete - 22nd June 2019

Melksham Station - 25th June

Melksham Carnival - 29th June

Semington Village Fete - 6th July

Bowerhill Barkers - 13th July

"Using the train with confidence" - 14th July

Melksham Party in the Park - 20th July

Thanks to our volunteers - **Judith, John, Peter, Ann, David, Martin and Robin** who have helped at these events. To **village fete** and **event organisers** who have been so helpful in setup and at all venues. To **James, Nicki and their team** at First Bus with our combined "help people Discover" bus and train information float in the Melksham Carnival. To **GWR** for their support and help in checking / proofing the tri-fold leaflet we have used throughout and generous support of our annual Santa trip through which have raised funds. To **Melksham Town** and **Melksham Without** parish councils for their significant (to us) support towards our expenses. Thanks also to **Lisa** for her graphic art production work to enable us to have such a great brochure to hand out.

The next meeting of MRUG will be at Melksham Town Hall at 19:30 on the 24th July. All welcome, free to attend and learn about upcoming plans. Experts will be on hand who can discuss your public transport needs too.



A more detailed analysis continues overleaf.

As a general rule across the UK, I am told that Community Rail is moving on and it's no longer (just? mainly?) about getting bums on seats. However, Melksham is unusual in that its station and the trains that call there are still under appreciated within the town. Passenger numbers have grown from around 3,000 journeys per year to around 75,000 journeys per year - that's 25 fold in the 25 years of records available to the Melksham Rail Development (now "User") group, but that's not the end of the story. 75,000 journeys is still a very low number of "bums on seats" indeed for a town of Melksham's size (it should be between 250,000 and 400,000 to be ever approach the level of other town stations) and there remains a need for local general promotion here. In Melksham there is not only the need to look after new customers, but also the need to inform the town's residents of the availability of train services. And that's the "traditional" community rail role that CRPs are perhaps moving on (and away?) from.



So ... in Shaw, in Whitley, in Semington, and twice in Melksham in the last month ... the Melksham Rail user Group has reached out away from the railway to the general public at town and village events which have provided the opportunity for us to reach people who we wouldn't otherwise meet at the station. They're at an excellent time of year too - just as the schools break up for the summer holidays, when "the kids" may be looking for things to do / parents for things to entertain them. When the days are long and the weather is warm to make leisure trips the more enjoyable. When Granny and Grandad are likely to visit, and it's so much easier to pick them up at Melksham Station that fight your way through the town to pick them up in Chippenham, or drive back and forth long distance to get them.

Make no mistake - booth work at these events can be hard work. No longer are rail users preaching to the converted of other rail users. They are taking in the who gambit of society, including those who have no need for travel, those who defend the cocoon of their private car for all journeys, and those who "wouldn't be seen dead" sharing a piece of public transport with a stranger. Then there are those who, whilst they are in theory supportive, have no need to travel or who's journeys, we have to admit, really don't work by train or bus. Wrong place, wrong time, too much to take with them. But in amongst those people - actually that majority - that the current public transport network does not serve are a rich seam who may not be aware of what's now available, may be misinformed as to the price or ease of using it, or simply may not have been "marketed" with it enough for them to choose to try it. So booth work is hard, is laden with polite rebuffs, but even a handful of successes through a long and hot afternoon can make it worthwhile in the long term - for you're likely not talking of a new user for a single journey but for multiple journeys, perhaps not very often, but spread out into the distant future.

Booth and carnival work can be hard ... and yet ... you note my comment about rebuffs being polite. And actually far fewer of those than "sales" stands got. Walking round in the carnival - "Would you like train and bus timetables" rather than forcing them into people's hands, and people were reaching out for them to the extent that we ran out of bus timetables! And at Party in the Park, several of the groups who did a polite "no thank you" and walked on came back and asked "on second thoughts, yes please - that could be useful for". **So - again - an especial THANK YOU to those who have helped at the sharp end during the last month.**

Passenger traffic at Melksham Station was static last year over the previous year. "I don't know how you managed that" said a senior GWR manager "considering that we took your train service away for 50 days while we electrified the line via Newbury". Our effective marketing and the needs of the community came together, and now with the unique electrification chaos passed we can grow again.

Written by Graham Ellis / Vice Chair Melksham Rail User Group / 21st July 2019.