Front Cover: A view from the air. Ken Bailey’s amazing photograph shows the engine shed in its context within the Sharpness dockland scene. More shots from Ken’s drone can be seen on page 14.

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Write to us
Vale of Berkeley Railway,
The Engine Shed, Dock Road,
Sharpness, Glos. GL13 9UD

valeofberkeleyrailway@gmail.com
Editorial: Happy Birthday to Us!

It is incredible to remind ourselves that it was only a year ago (15th August 2015) that CRT gave us the keys to the shed at Sharpness and it all began. And, we have to admit that, pausing from all the hard work and activity going on in and around the shed, we do allow ourselves now and again to wallow in the glow of people saying how much we have achieved.

But not for long. We are all very much aware that the shed is only base camp for the VoBR. In this edition of the magazine, which has grown from 20 to 24 pages just from the sheer weight of news to report, you will see how hard we are pushing ahead to make that urgent transition from what is a very nice engineering base into setting up what we call Phase 1 of the railway proper—the development of the Forest Sidings site on the other side of the harbour.

All the work at the shed—and a normal Wednesday now sees up to 20 volunteers on site—is about getting us into the position so that when Phase 1 starts, we have all the equipment we need ready to go and that is why we launched the Signalling Appeal (see p10). By the time we get access to the branch, we want to have to hand pretty much everything we need to erect 4 signal boxes, install about 50 odd signals and add all the various cranks and bits that go with them. Mechanical signalling is now disappearing from the national network at an alarming rate and we need to get it while we can. This means now, so please support this fund with a donation if you can.

‘Talks at the Shed’ When Paul Woollard asked if he could do a show of his photography as his contribution to our efforts, I thought it was a great idea (and 4 of his best photos appear in this edition) but I didn’t expect the idea to grow so that it is rapidly becoming a monthly meeting point for anyone interested in what we are doing. Most months we aim to have an interesting speaker or activity but we also use the meetings to give you an up-to-the-minute update of what is going on (as well as a free cup of tea and a biscuit!). To date we have been raising about £100 in donations each month, which is amazing. The list of events until the end of the year is on page 22.

The Events Team: It’s not just these talks - we have people bringing groups to visit all the time and we keep being invited to talk and display our wares at all sorts of venues in the area. It is really important that are able to keep gathering support for our railway through these events and, luckily, we now have a growing team of people that we can call on to help out. This demand will continue to grow so, if you can spare even a couple of hours to help us with this, please let us know, especially if you live over in the Stroud, Yate or Bristol area.

And, as ever, please feel free to contribute anything that might be of interest to our members — it’s YOUR magazine!

But back to Phase 1. As Mike keeps reminding us, this is really the only show in town and, until we are on site at Forest Sidings with the 4F in steam outside the shed, everything else is secondary. For this we are going to need 3 or 4 times the number of volunteers just so that we can staff the barest of rail services so please put the word out there whenever you can.

Howard Parker, Editor
Wow—what a difference three months makes! Since my last offering for the magazine, progress has been relentless and, with so much going on, it is difficult to know where to begin.

I will, however, expand on the detail of many of the outline arrangements/agreements for the whole branch affecting DRS/NR and C&RT in subsequent editions and as the Editor allows me space to do so! That said, I hope you will all find the initial report in this issue of the proposed DRS loop at Berkeley interesting and serve as a prelude and taster as to how things are expected to move forwards over the course of the next 2-3 years.

**Engine Shed now fully operational!**

The best bit of news for now is the completion of our move into the ES and with it, the completion of over 90% of the refurbishment works. It has been a long 10 month slog but we finally got there and already we are reaping the benefits of an almost perfect start-up facility/HQ for a fledgling heritage railway with facilities that range from Engineering, Erecting, Boiler, Machine Shop Workshops to Administration and excellent Welfare and Meeting Room areas. It does not get much better and is 100% better than anything we had previously been accustomed to elsewhere. So, a massive thank-you to everyone who has worked so hard to produce the wonderful facility we can enjoy today as we set about developing and executing our plans for the branch.

**Membership and Volunteering**

Membership continues to blossom with most recruited Members (and, very importantly, Volunteers!) living within the County, something which is vital if we are to attract regular and strong Volunteer attendance to help rejuvenate the railway as plans unfold and become a reality.

We have not pushed for national coverage of our plans up to now but expect this to change very soon as the story of our exciting plans begin to crystallise and attract prospective Members living much further away.

At the moment our Volunteering statistics are bucking the national trend with one in four joining Members choosing to take up Volunteering work compared to just one in nine/ten nationally. Wednesday and Saturday attendance continues to be very busy with Volunteers working in various areas ranging from the vital tasks of administration, induction courses, familiarisation visits through to the equally important “hands on” tasks and various engineering orientated projects around the Shed, some directly relevant to eventual operations on the branch itself.

If you choose to become a VoBR Volunteer (in any capacity you desire!), there is published a weekly VoBR Work Progress Diary specifically intended for Volunteers who are kept informed of work in hand and who is doing it. Comments are always invited around whether what we do can be done any better. It being recognised how important it is for everyone to be kept informed and consulted wherever possible. *(There is also the ‘Sharpness Volunteer’ Facebook group for people who want to chat about what is going on —Ed)*
Rolling Stock

As many of you may already know, we have a huge collection of railway vehicles, all destined for eventual use on VoBR. Many significant items have been restored and are already operational, including two steam locomotives. This means that start-up passenger operations from day one, in only a few years time, will therefore, not be an issue.

A number of historic items have already been delivered to Sharpness and placed in store in the shipyard next door to the ES. These represent only a fraction of stock that will become available to us in the longer term although a few more selected items will follow. Recently, we took delivery of an ex BR “Sturgeon” 40 ton capacity rail carrying wagon that will be an essential vehicle as we rebuild the railway.

‘Phase One’

This is a term you will hear a great deal in the coming months as we really start to crank up and crystalize the various initiatives needed to eventually commence steam hauled heritage train services on a section of the branch.

There will be meetings in the autumn to launch this exciting initiative where you will be invited to come and hear our plans in detail but in the meantime we hope we can give you a flavour of our future plans and the work required to turn it into a reality as soon as we can. The article in this edition, news and social media releases in between will keep you all posted on any significant developments.

C&RT and Sharpness lands

And finally, a short piece about our relationship with C&RT. I can confirm we have a number of outline agreements in place relating to C&RT owned Sharpness lands that have a direct bearing on our future.

This includes the site of the original Sharpness Station and a site that is to be allocated for a VoBR Engine Shed and Locomotive & Carriage & Wagon Repair Workshops.

I will explain more of these arrangements in subsequent Editions of the magazine.

(Right): Mike explains our plans for Phase 1 development of the branch during his recent ‘Talk at the Shed’.
Volunteering on the VOBR goes from Strength to Strength!
By Volunteer Liaison Co-ordinator, Paul West

What an amazing ten months it’s been for volunteering! Since the engine shed doors opened for business last August, the number of volunteer hours worked has been increasing rapidly. During April and May alone, more than 1,000 hours were recorded and the grand total now stands at 2,600 hours. This has enabled us to crack on over a number of areas, including the initial refurbishment and setting up of the workshop and offices, track clearance, and not least the seemingly endless job of moving things on to site and locating them there, and in the right order!

As the railway operation continues to grow apace the variety of tasks will increase with it, so please keep an eye on our Facebook site for up to date information on the activities and opportunities on offer. There will be tasks to suit all ages and skill levels and time commitment is entirely up to you. You can become a member of an existing team, join a group for a one-off task, or in time, you may consider becoming a team-leader yourself. Be assured, there is always work to be done on the railway or activities promoting the VoBR at external events!

If you would like to find out more about volunteering with the VoBR, please drop us an e-mail on valeofberkeleyrailway@gmail.com or feel free to call in to the engine shed 0900 -16.00 Wed. or Sat., which are our main volunteer days at present (other days by arrangement).

The team responsible for following up volunteer applications, arranging and running shed tours and conducting induction courses is growing. Chris Cane and Laurence Gulliford have been joined by Janet Gough, (seen, right, at their regular meeting in the Board Room) who has kindly agreed to take over the role of Volunteer Liaison Co-ordinator from myself. Thank you very much Janet, much appreciated. The courses will, of necessity, be the subject of constant revision, as the scope and diversity of operations on the railway increases.

We now have almost 1000 people who ‘Like’ our page: ‘Vale of Berkeley Railway’. The page is updated every day, and it is the very best way of knowing exactly what is going on at the railway almost as it happens.
Welcome to Our New Volunteers!

Steve Virgo
Bob Stevenson
Tim Clutterbuck
Mike Wathen
Chris Brooks
Peter Whistler
John Sibert
Stephen Holford
Peter & Janet Gough
Ron Carr
Des and Paul Colechin
Keith & Irene Eames
Roger Ellis
Robert Gerrard
Stu Priday
Ian Raven
Peter White
Tim Cambray
Martyn Clemes
Andrew Bullock
Paul & Daniel Richardson
Judith Freeman
Chris Sturgeon
Jim Knowles
Brenda & Wyn Stone
Frank Woolridge
Peter Exley
Bob Holder
Colin Boyles
Paul Tucker
Graham Wiltshire
Peter Poliszewski
Vincent Sims.

Thank you all for volunteering, and a very warm welcome to the Vale of Berkeley Railway!

Steve Virgo, who lives in Berkeley, had to get his GCSEs over before he could start volunteering. He has ambitions to work in the Permanent Way department, which will keep him busy.

Membership Matters

As at the end of July 2016, membership stands at nearly 200 fully paid up members, which is a great achievement. What’s more, 1 in 4 members is becoming a volunteer in some capacity which is a much higher proportion than we would have expected.

Can we get to 250 or even more by Xmas 2016? We think so but we are relying on you to spread the word to everyone you meet.

If you belong to a local society or group, please suggest that we come and talk to members and please pick up some membership forms from reception at the Shed! You never know when you might need them!

Are You a Working Volunteer?

Join ‘Sharpness Volunteer’ on Facebook to keep in touch.
Volunteering on the VoBR

Join the VoBR Trust

Fill in a Volunteer Form

Attend an Induction Course

Join us at ‘The Engine Shed’

Volunteer Induction Courses

Such is the demand to get involved that Induction Sessions at the Engine Shed are now held monthly so please book your place now:

valeofberkeleyrailway@gmail.com

From Janet Gough, Volunteer Coordinator

I joined the VoBR, together with my husband Peter, in February 2016. Having recently retired after working for 20 years in heritage conservation I was looking for an opportunity where I could offer my time in a volunteer capacity.

I can’t lift heavy weights, prefer not to get dirty and have no aspirations to drive a train but I was interested to see if there was anything I could usefully contribute.

After attending a friendly and informative induction course in April I joined the team which looks after volunteer recruitment and induction and am now happily involved in welcoming others to the railway.

I’m usually at the Shed once a week plus time spent at home on the laptop. Volunteering with the VoBR can be pretty much what you want it to be. Why not join us…?

Roger Newman gives one half of the boiler trolley its top coat. This useful piece of equipment will allow us to move the 4F’s boiler under cover for work to begin in the next few weeks.

Peter Bennett has given the ‘Vanguard’ probably the shiniest buffers ever seen on a lowly diesel shunter!

Our (new) Website

Valeofberkeleyrailway.co.uk

Volunteering on the VoBR

Join the VoBR Trust

Fill in a Volunteer Form

Attend an Induction Course

Join us at ‘The Engine Shed’

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Volunteer Induction Courses

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valeofberkeleyrailway@gmail.com
From early childhood I became addicted to drawing and painting: it came naturally to me. I attended Hartlepool Art College and then spent a number of years working as a photographic technician, whilst drawing and painting in my spare time. On my marriage I moved to Bristol and worked in a department store there. During this time I received a number of commissions from customers of their houses and pets. Following my redundancy from the store I took the decision to go full-time with art. Membership of the Guild of Railway Artists has meant that my work has been exhibited at a wide selection of venues such as the National Railway Museum, York and Shildon, Carlisle Cathedral, Kidderminster Railway Museum and the East and West Somerset Railways. Most of my work is to commission for a wide variety of clients. I have learnt a great deal by studying the work of, and taking constructive criticism from some well known artists and railway professionals.

**Standish Junction**  
This oil painting was one of my earliest works. The scene was adapted, with permission, from a photograph by the late Hugh Ballantyne. The work was commissioned by my late Father-in-Law, George West, who worked in the junction signal box during World War Two. His official role was booking boy, but for much of the time he effectively ran the box, due to the advanced age of the signalmen, who had been retained because of the war. As an aside, my husband Paul can probably claim to have been the youngest person ever to signal a train through the junction, much later of course, in 1965, about the era portrayed. Appropriately the painting now hangs in Standish village hall, just down the road from the site of the box, and near where George was born and brought up. From a technical point of view the hardest part of the work was the complexity of the p/way at this point.

Julie West (GRA)  
There are not many railways with their own resident artist so we are very fortunate to have Julie West as one of our earliest members. Prints of her paintings grace our foyer and, in the years to come, we are sure that she will be recording in oils the development of our railway. Here she tells us how it all started. Follow this link to her gallery: [http://www.railart.co.uk/gallery/west.shtml](http://www.railart.co.uk/gallery/west.shtml)
The Signalling Fund

by Mike Hoskin

This was created as a separate fund raising effort to purchase the now increasingly rare mechanical signalling equipment (semaphore signals and associated signal boxes) needed and so vital to the contributing ambience of any steam heritage railway. Essentially we need 4 boxes and all their associated equipment for: Sharpness station (GWR), Oldminster Junction, Berkeley station and Berkeley Road (all MR/LMS)

To date, the fund has successfully purchased and transported to Sharpness, the entire GWR signal box lever frame needed for a rejuvenated Sharpness Station and has transported a complete GWR signal that has been donated to us. In addition, negotiations are in hand with Network Rail and now RIDC (Railway Innovation & Development Centre) to secure the 3 Midland style Signal Boxes and signalling equipment that are needed to operate the branch.

Time is rapidly running out for mechanical signalling equipment from the national rail network and by 2020 it is projected that the vast majority of historically suitable signalling equipment for the VoBR will be gone for ever—such is the urgency of this fund and why we have brought forward such an initiative now.

“Please consider if you can help with this vital initiative and, if you would like to contribute to the fund, no matter how small, as either a donation, loan or Share Conversion, please email me direct (churchill8f@hotmail.com) and I will provide further details by return.”

Mike Hoskin

Our first signal has come free from a local garden at Rangeworthy, a kind gift from the widow of the owner (above).

When re-erected it will become the down starter from Oldminster in the direction of Sharpness and will have a fixed distant attached. It will carry a small plaque recognising the family’s kind contribution.

(Right) Kevin Hoskin directs the same signal onto a trestle in the yard. As they arrive, all signalling parts are being stripped, refurbished, painted in primer and then put into store ready for the moment they can be erected in their correct position on the branch.
Paul Woollard’s talk ‘Railways in the Landscape’ was the first of our monthly ‘Talks At the Shed’ (see page 22 for talks for the rest of 2016).

On the following 2 pages, he presents 4 of his photos that, for him capture interesting moments in the recent history of freight traffic on the branch.

Top Left Dramatic midwinter light fills the start of the cutting section between Sharpness and Berkeley as 37194 & 607 head towards the Berkeley Railhead with the 6V73 Crewe to Berkeley on 27-01-14. The duo have run round their consist of a single PFA wagon, mounting an empty container, which will be exchanged for a full shipment originating from a facility in Oxfordshire, on arrival at the Berkeley siding.

Bottom Left Seen from the roadside, not far from the site of the soon to be rebuilt Sharpness Station, 31275 can be seen ‘running round’ its (out of sight) flask train on 24-06-1993. Two things of interest are firstly: a Civil Engineer’s ‘OBA’ wagon can just be seen in front of the loco. This had been used to deliver scrap rail ‘backplates’ to the then Coopers Metals facility; a rare alternative traffic flow by 1993. Secondly, Berkeley Power Station can be seen in the background, in it’s physically complete form. This shot was taken 4 years after it had ceased generation, after over 26 years of safe operation. It was to be around 2 years from the date of this view before decommissioning of ancillary structures started to radically alter the site’s distinctive appearance. If you look closely, a local photographer can be seen obtaining a close-up study of the locomotive!

Top Right 2 May 1991 saw one of the few visits of the Hunslet-Barclay weed killer train to the Sharpness Branch. At the time, 20s were a relatively rare sight on the line, a situation that would be changed when DRS took over nuclear shipments in 2000. This view shows 20901-904, with their matching distinctively liveried train, approaching the Jnc at Berkeley Road.

Bottom Right The 7th Jan 2016 was a historic day for the Sharpness Branch (although this might have escaped many people’s notice!) The date saw the final shipment of irradiated (spent) nuclear fuel from Oldbury Power Station, thus bringing to an end more than 55 years of such transshipments at the Berkeley Railhead, situated near to the site of the former Berkeley Station. Over that half century, the fuel, transported in flasks, originated from Berkeley Power Station, Berkeley Nuclear Laboratories, and the aforementioned Oldbury site. Here the final fuel shipment can be seen, barely a quarter of a mile into the first stage of the journey to Sellafield, in Cumbria, with train 6M56, for which DRS saw fit to provide ‘Northern Belle’ 57305-312 to do the honours.
A View from Above.

These fascinating photographs, taken and sent in by Ken Bailey, shows how our Engine Shed fits in with the dock scene. They were taken from a drone in June 2016.
LMS 4F 0-6-0 No 4027 by Kevin Hoskin

Owned by the National Railway Museum, this loco is undergoing a major overhaul with the necessary attention to quality and detail appropriate for a loco of the National Collection.

The 4F class may have been built, initially by the Midland Railway and later by the LMS, for fairly mundane duties, but this particular engine was saved for the nation because it was the very first built by the LMS in 1924.

It worked until 1964 when it was preserved, along with two other LMS members of the class: 4123, which is under restoration at our neighbours, the Avon Valley Railway, and 44422, which is at work on the West Somerset Railway. One of the earlier MR built versions is working on the Keighley and worth Valley Railway.

4027 was initially restored to steam for the Rainhill 150 celebrations in 1980 and spent time at The Midland Railway Centre at Butterley before coming to us via the Gloucestershire Warwickshire Railway.

Prior to the loco arriving at Sharpness, overhaul work had slowed but now that she is being worked on at a far better well equipped facility, we are confident the overhaul will now make rapid progress. Work to date has included an extensive overhaul of the ‘bottom end’ and some work on the boiler.

Our developing partnership with our next door neighbours: Sharpness Shipyard & Drydock Ltd is bearing fruit and they are to be engaged to manufacture or extensively refurbish the tender tank once a full engineering appraisal has been completed.

It is anticipated No 4027 will become the first working loco for the VoBR trains and indeed it is a most appropriate loco for the line since members of the class based at Gloucester Barnwood shed were a familiar sight on the branch freights from the docks for many years.

Our sincere thanks go to the NRM for their perseverance and patience during the protracted move of the loco to its new home at Sharpness. She should feel very much at home flying the flag for NRM and VoBR and we hope that this will be just the start of an exciting collaboration with the NRM on other exciting initiatives in the years to come.
Bringing Back the Railway to Berkeley and Sharpness.

Mike Hoskin reviews the history and talks about how we are approaching the task.

Most steam heritage railways in the UK are a result of reopening railway routes closed under the Beeching Cuts of the 1960s. Often, the track had been recovered and the infrastructure demolished and preservationists faced huge obstacles before trains could run again.

They found that it is not as easy as it appears to re-open a closed railway line and some railways that started out with ambitious plans in the 1970/80s, are still struggling to achieve their desired end goals, with varying degrees of success.

Preservation “mania” reached its peak by the mid 1980s, and railways like the Mid Hants Railway and East Lancs Railway were among some of the last significant railways to reopen with a preservation bias. In more recent times, newer start-up schemes have largely taken over disused Network Rail lines in an abandoned or neglected state – the Ecclesbourne Valley Railway and Spa Valley Railway being two such examples. Both took over lines where the track was still in place but the Passenger infrastructure either removed or in a badly run down state.

The Sharpness Branch

Our proposals presented an altogether different proposition. For a start, the branch was, and still is, used regularly by Direct Rail Services (DRS) to convey traffic to and from the Nuclear Decommissioning Agency (NDA) pad at Berkeley under the “one train on the branch at a time” method of operation. The line had also been downgraded to freight only status in earlier years with only the very occasional Passenger Excursion or Charter Train allowed on the branch from time to time as is permitted by NR.

An early discussion with the Office of Rail and Road (ORR) revealed that we could potentially operate trains on the branch under a License Exemption Order but we would first have to gain consent from Network Rail and other interested asset stakeholders, in this case DRS, to do so.

The question was, how could this be achieved with the current operating arrangements for the branch in place and how would we be able to change the line status from freight back to passenger operation, without significant costly work?

Since rail borne freight traffic to and from Sharpness Docks ceased in the 1990’s, DRS had become the only remaining significant user of the branch. Its mode of branch operation was, and still is, the same as it had been since the 90’s.

In the 1960s, nuclear flasks were just a normal part of goods trains! Here a GWR Collett Goods loco with a flask just behind the guards van pauses near Gloucester.
There were never any locomotive run-round facilities provided at Berkeley for Berkeley bound NDA trains, and today all arriving trains still have to travel the full length of the branch down to the run-round facility at Sharpness (Oldminster Loop) where this manoeuvre is carried out. The train is then hauled back to Berkeley, half way along the length of the branch, where it is shunted into the NDA Siding for processing. Once work is completed, the train is hauled back to Berkeley Road Junction thence on to the main line and to the north. All very inconvenient and excessively complex for DRS train crews!

With this operation in mind, we developed the idea that if a locomotive run-round loop could be provided at Berkeley, DRS could carry out all its manoeuvres at that one point avoiding the need to travel the extra distance to Sharpness. Later on, we learned that DRS had security concerns over the use of the loop at Sharpness given the close proximity of a public foot crossing, and this issue indirectly supported our proposal. We therefore sought a meeting with DRS at their HQ in Carlisle where we explained our proposals identifying a possible way forward. In the event, our plans were met with a very positive response indeed and it is the detail of these that we have been developing with DRS in close partnership ever since.

Our proposal, therefore, is very simple. VoBR will entirely resource the provision of a locomotive run-round loop for DRS use at Berkeley on part of the original double-track formation, using all the materials needed for the work from its Sponsors’ stock of materials.

This arrangement would enable us to work towards an agreement with NR we could initially operate steam hauled heritage trains between Sharpness and the original Berkeley Station, just short of the NDA siding beyond.

This arrangement has been agreed in outline form subject to all the other important details that will also need to be agreed. What took us by surprise (and delighted us!) was DRS’s further suggestion that later on it would be happy to discuss a means of operation that would enable VoBR trains to operate the full length of the branch to a new possible ‘Park and Ride’ station at Berkeley Road, but clear of the main line, giving us direct road access off the A38 and M5 Junctions 13 and 14. We have already looked at this and it is very possible, subject to agreements with, particularly the road planning authorities.

DRS went on to explain that there were other business benefits to their operation by accommodating VoBR trains over that section of the branch too: At the moment, DRS trains travelling from the north are required to pause at Cheltenham (Ailstone Lane) Signal Box to collect the “Staff” for the Sharpness branch. This “Staff” allows trains on to the branch and is also the means by which the Berkeley lever frame can be opened for access to the NDA siding utilising a special key (Annetts Key) which forms part of the “Staff”. DRS are allowed a mere 3 minutes to pause and collect the “Staff” at Cheltenham. Not a great deal of time, but actually quite a lot, when you consider the heavily used nature of the main line such that every minute counts. The same amount of time is allowed to drop the “Staff” back on the return journey – arrangements that present an unnecessary nuisance to the operating people.
DRS also proposed that if the branch "Staff" formed part of a VoBR arrangement for the operation of the whole branch, the "Staff" could be relocated to the VoBR Berkeley Road Signal Box where it could form part of a new "method of operation" for the branch.

So, for DRS, and measured in purely business terms, its "on branch" operation would be streamlined by obviating the need to run round at Sharpness, shaving a good half hour from the processing time for each train and once VoBR installs its own signal box at Berkeley Road, further time savings by cutting out the Cheltenham stops.

All these things contribute to a very powerful business case for DRS to work with VoBR and this, therefore, is the basis on which we are negotiating. Enabler discussions with both NR and DRS now drilling down to the fine detail of the lease and operating arrangements.

In parallel with all of this are our ongoing discussions with Canal & River Trust where we continue to detail an already agreed outline set of proposals to fully restore the original Sharpness Station and eventually operate VoBR trains from it. This would form Phase 2, once we have trains up and running from a temporary station erected adjacent to Oldminster loop which is part of our plans for our Phase One intentions. I will expand on this and more of our longer term plans in the Autumn edition of the magazine.

The detail of our plans for Phase One at Sharpness I hope we can reveal in the same edition, these will be supported by a VoBRCo Share Issue launch intended to raise the Capital to finance the infrastructural works required, later in the year.

Berkeley Station—Proposed Layout
At long last the transition from installing, repairing, making parts for and commissioning machine tools to actually using them to make things for the railway has started.

Paul West has been leading a team stripping, cleaning, painting and reassembling the point lever mechanisms that are needed to build the new run-round loop at Berkeley to be used by the DRS nuclear flask trains. The lever mechanisms are of the right vintage for use on the VoBR and consequently have seen many years of use prior to coming to us. Not surprisingly some parts are badly worn and Paul has requested quite a few new bits to be made which has kept me (very happily) busy on lathe and milling machine.

Kevin (characteristically) has been producing large quantities of deep blue coloured swarf on our large lathe making the trolley that soon will hold the 4F locomotive boiler. As a relative youngster Kevin has grown up with modern replaceable tip machine tool cutters in a modern production environment and is perfectly at home machining at high speeds / high feed rates with heavy cuts – hence the colour of the swarf generated!

Meanwhile Tony Goddard and several volunteers, many of whom seem to be called “Paul” (including Hale, Grinfields) and with apologies to anyone else (called Paul or otherwise!) that I have missed, have continued restoring other machine tools which will increase the scope of work that we will be able to undertake ourselves. We are very fortunate to be in a position where the volunteers who have joined VoBR already have the skills needed to refurbish machine tools so that they are almost as good as new when we start using them.

Work has also continued apace on the 0-4-0 Vanguard shunter that is to be the VoBR works loco. Fortunately this engine is a “runner”, only needing cosmetic restoration and Andrew Woodall and Peter Bennett, ably assisted by several others, have now finished painting it in time for its first public appearance at the steam fair at South Cerney in August, which is one of the largest and a great opportunity to promote the fledgling VoBR. The VoBR diesel team is pressing ahead with the engine repairs to our class 03 and work on the unique 7069 is also continuing with repainting of the engine compartment now in the correct shade of grey!

Offsite, the ‘Men Shed’ Community Workshop in Nailsworth have started work refurbishing one of our platform sack trucks. Men Shed volunteers work to an impressively high standard and we are hopeful of forming a long term relationship with them, the current work being, with luck, the first of many projects that they will take on for us. Very many thanks to VoBR member and volunteer Bob Stevenson for introducing VoBR to Men Shed and for facilitating this first project.

The focus is firmly on those jobs which enable us to start running trains on the Sharpness branch line as soon as possible. In the yard behind the engine shed, signal posts are being refurbished and we are keen to form some teams to get the wagons currently stored on the track in front of the shed ready for use as soon as we have access to the branch line. Please let us know if you would like to be involved!
An Introduction to Buildings on the Vale of Berkeley Railway

The leader of our Buildings team, Tim Cambray, provides an introduction to the various buildings that used to be on the VoBR before closure in 1964. In later editions, as our plans move forward, he will discuss in greater detail, what we hope to do to rebuild these stations so that they replicate as faithfully as possible the original structures and flavour of each locality.

While the VoBR has a well defined track bed and a large amount of track (laid to and maintained to Network Rail (NR) standards), it has no buildings. All the station buildings, signal boxes, water towers, goods sheds and passenger shelters have been removed, some, in the case of Berkeley station building, as late as 1984.

As part of the resurrection of the railway, one of our biggest challenges is our intention to rebuild all the structures associated with it as they were in their heyday.

As originally built, there were three stations on the line, Berkeley Road (the junction with Brunel’s Bristol and Gloucester Railway), Berkeley and Sharpness. It was only when the Severn Bridge was completed in 1879 that Severn Bridge halt, on the other side of the river, was added. This connected to Lydney Junction station and all the Forest of Dean railways. There was also a temporary station at Sharpness.

There were station Master’s houses at Berkeley Road (left) and Berkeley but not at Sharpness. Both of these have survived and are currently occupied as private dwellings.

The layout at Berkeley Road included a footbridge, station buildings on the down line to Bristol and the up line to Glos. A wooden waiting room on the triangle platform for passengers going on the branch was also provided. Just beyond the actual junction was a signal box. The substantial and ornate goods shed and sidings were also on the down side.
Berkeley

As befitting a station close to Berkeley Castle, a lovely 'Italianate' building was provided at Berkeley, opposite the existing station master's house (that is currently for sale).

The style and plan is almost identical to that surviving at Butterley in Derbyshire at the Midland railway Centre although that is in stone not brick.

Berkeley is where the loading crane and pod for the DRS nuclear flask traffic is located. It is on the site of the old goods shed and yard, of which nothing remains.

Sharpness

The history here is a little more complex. A joint MR/Severn and Wye railway design led to a unique design of station building (although Peter Smith's book on the subject offers Cinderford station as being quite similar).

The general Midland ambiance was counteracted by a thoroughly Great Western signal box which was, curiously and uniquely, semi detached, having a rather basic passenger shelter attached to it serving platform 2 at the front.

The water column, originally Midland, was replaced by a standard GWR 'parachute' water tank) on the end of the main platform. The pretty station building was at the bottom of the pedestrian access slope down from the Severn Bridge and Railway Hotel.

The area beyond the station looking towards the docks was the goods yard although there is no evidence of a goods shed (see photo below). There was a wooden goods office provided near the entrance to the site just over the bridge (in front of the Hotel and at the ends of the platforms). The botched brickwork infill to the bridge sides, where the steps to the platform used to be, can still be seen.

The 3 station sites are now very overgrown and until we have gained access to them, we will not know what survives of other structures, such as other line side buildings (platelayers huts, etc) on the branch.

Until then we continue to research and build up our understanding of our buildings heritage so that when the time comes we will know exactly what we need to do to restore the stations to their former glory.
‘Talks at the Shed’

Our monthly meetings at the Shed take place usually on the 3rd Thursday of the Month. They start at 19.30 and finish by about 21.30. They are free to attend and with free refreshments but we do seek to raise money for our activities through donations received. All events are listed on the VoBR Facebook page.

**Thursday 22 September:** Photography Night with Jack Boskett

Jack is a young local professional photographer, based in Tewkesbury. He shoots a wide variety of subjects but is a keen railway enthusiast and volunteers on heritage railways. His work is now in demand in national railway and other magazines and he is known for his unique style.

**Thursday 20 October:** Film Night: ‘Train of Events’

This fabulous 1949 classic, which stars Jack Warner as the engine driver and a youthful Leslie Phillips as his fireman is remarkable not just for its lovely period details but also for the amount of real railway knowledge that informs it. Marvellous LMS shed scenes. Bring your own popcorn!

**Thursday 17th November:** The Best Way to see Snowdonia

Tim Maynard, chair of the Bristol Group of the world-famous Ffestiniog Railway Society takes us on a tour round North Wales on the now extensive network of 2’ narrow gauge railways

**Thursday 15th December:**

**Christian Wolmar**

Not to be Missed!!! Christian is probably the most respected and, sometimes, controversial rail journalist in the UK, with regular columns in the leading railway magazines. He has written over a dozen authoritative and challenging books on railway matters. His latest is ‘Are Trams Socialist’, an analysis of why the UK lags so far behind Europe in its development of tram networks in cities. Find out more about him at: www.christianwolmar.co.uk.

**Coming in 2017:** a two part aerial trip down the river Severn with Richard Kelsey, starting in the Welsh hills and ending at the Severn bridges.

Do you know someone with local and historical knowledge who would like to share it with us? Please let us know either by email or Facebook.
Julie West GRA

Capture the atmosphere of your favourite railway scene, past or present, steam or diesel, in oils or pencil.

I can also undertake Landscapes, Pets, nature and Still life.

See more of my work at www.artistjuliegra.co.uk
or tel. 01453 549361 for more details