



## PRESS INFORMATION

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### **Severn Valley Railway remembers its 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary - by laying new track!**

WHETHER running Royal Trains, re-enacting 'how it was' in the 1940s or staging spectacular steam galas for thousands of visitors, the Severn Valley Railway has always been 'up' for the big occasion.

But tomorrow – Wednesday February 1<sup>st</sup> - is the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first-ever public trains on the line – and the moment will be marked not by the waving of flags, or by any grand ceremony – or even by the running of any special trains. In fact, there won't BE any trains!

Instead, far from the public gaze, in the normally dark depths of the subterranean 480-yard long Bewdley Tunnel, contractors will rather symbolically be doing exactly what their Victorian forerunners did almost exactly 150 years ago – laying down and connecting up new 60ft lengths of track.

Since the SVR's festive season train services ended on January 3<sup>rd</sup>, the popular 16-mile Kidderminster-to-Bridgnorth heritage line has been on shutdown, engaged upon a major £250,000 civil engineering project to cut new drainage channels in the tunnel, replace and reballast more than a third of a mile of track through the single bore, renew signal cabling and repair the two sandstone portals.

Special 'forced ventilation equipment has been employed to allow workmen to breath in an atmosphere that would otherwise be polluted by fumes from plant and machinery.

It's vital work which brings the Railway's total spend on infrastructure renewals over the last three and a half years, to a steady £1.5 million.

Engineers have been working against the clock to get the project completed by February 11<sup>th</sup> - a week on Saturday – when steam trains return to the line and the SVR becomes fully operational once again for the schools' half-term holiday period (Saturday February 11<sup>th</sup> to Sunday February 19<sup>th</sup>).

In that respect, the good news is that everything is going to plan. But what about the SVR's 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary? It surely isn't being forgotten?

"Absolutely not!" says SVR General Manager Nick Ralls reassuringly. "The heavy engineering renewals and track replacement has been planned for a long time, and it

makes good sense to undertake this work during the normally quiet period between New Year and the start of the school half-term holidays.

“But we are officially celebrating the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary on May 19<sup>th</sup> & 20<sup>th</sup> with a brand new event – our first ever Victorian Weekend – which, with the help of ‘Queen Victoria’ herself, and some amazing Victorian steam locomotives from the 1860s and 1870s period which we are bringing in specially, we will create the mood of the Severn Valley Railway just as it was when it first opened in 1862.”

Central to the recreation of a classic ‘Victorian train’ of that period, the SVR will be ‘importing’ the oldest working standard gauge (4ft 8 ½ in) steam locomotive in Britain – former Furness Railway No.20 (from the Ribble Steam Railway near Preston, Lancs) which was being built at the Manchester factory of Sharp Stewart & Co just a few months after the SVR first opened.

Two other period locomotives, the 1871-built Head Wrightson vertical-boilered ‘Coffee Pot’ which was returned to steam in 2010, and the 1877-built saddletank *Seaham No.18*, which worked Seaham Harbour up on the north-east coast near Sunderland for 93 years, will be despatched to the Severn Valley Railway from Beamish Open Air Museum near Stanley, Co.Durham.

‘Queen Victoria’, brilliantly portrayed by role-model actress Sylvia Strange from Onibury, Shropshire, will travel the length of the line, addressing her ‘subjects’.

A welter of supporting attractions is also planned, including a Victorian ‘beach’ complete with Punch and Judy shows at Arley, a specially recreated Victorian school classroom at The Engine House Visitor Centre at Highley (visitors will be able to wear the classic period smocks, and actually take part in a lesson!), while Kidderminster Railway Museum (on site at Kidderminster station) will stage a photographic exhibition recording the history of the railway from 1862 to date. Highley Brass Band will also be at The Engine House, to set the tone.

The event that will be celebrated in May, is the opening to public passenger trains by the original Severn Valley Railway Company, of the 40-mile section of line between Hartlebury Junction and Shrewsbury on February 1<sup>st</sup> 1862, which created the first rail link between Worcester and Shrewsbury.

The very first passenger train was a ‘VIP Special’ - historically, though dubiously recorded as a colossal 22-coach train, which ran the previous day, on January 31<sup>st</sup> .....exactly 150 years ago today!

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