

NEWSLETTER November 2020

A FRESH LOOK OUT THE FRONT



We have achieved an improvement in the appearance of the station by refreshing the stone chippings in front of the building. At first glance this may look quite a small area, but eight tonnes of chippings were required, all paid for by proceeds from the book shop. That was shovelled and raked into place by our volunteers - Greg Beecroft, Simon Dell, Cathy & Stewart Galbraith and Sheena Inglis. This prompted a tweet from Alex Hynes, the Managing Director of ScotRail: *Thank you for everything you all do to look after this wonderful station and national treasure!*

PAT NEESON

Pat Neeson has retired as Treasurer of Friends of Wemyss Bay Station. She was 'volunteered' as Treasurer by her husband, Paul, at the first meeting of our steering group and accepted the post despite still being in full-time employment. Typically of this husband and wife team, they became totally involved in the many tasks facing the newly-formed group: rewiring and plumbing; fitting bespoke doors for the bookshop; erecting, dismantling and re-erecting bookshelves; landscaping; gardening; and representing us at conferences.

Pat investigated insurance schemes and managed our finances quietly and efficiently throughout these hectic early years. We came to value her practical common sense and dry sense of humour – whenever she got tired of endless discussions at committee meetings she would tell us “Just spend the money – it’s what it’s there for!”

We wish her well and thank both her and Paul for their hard work and good company over the years. We shall miss them.

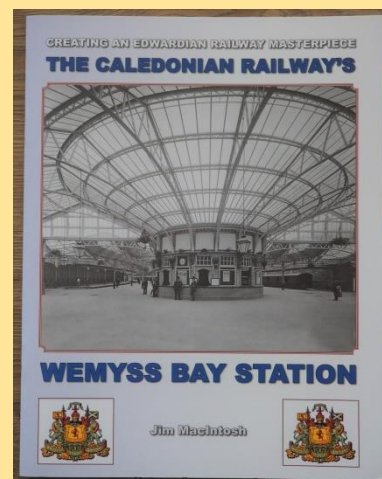
We are grateful to Erika Charlier for taking on the role of Treasurer.

Wemyss Bay on TV again: Tim Dunn visited Wemyss Bay on 22nd October, to film another episode of his TV series *The Architecture the Railways Built*. Sue Hothersall and Dugald Cameron were interviewed about the history and design of the station, and Cathy Galbraith about the gardening and flowers. The programme will be broadcast on the Yesterday channel.

JIM MACINTOSH

We were very sorry to learn of the death of Jim MacIntosh, an Honorary Member of the Friends.

Jim was a leading member of the Caledonian Railway Society and the author of our book about Wemyss Bay station. He was born in Port Glasgow and had a family connection with the Caledonian, as his wife's grandfather had been a driver on the railway. He was happy to share his extensive knowledge of the railway and will be missed by many. We send our condolences to his family.



Bookshop Report

We are grateful for the many donations of books that we have received recently. We now have an extensive selection about the world of show business that were owned by actor and comedian Johnny Beattie, who died this year. We thank his daughter, Maureen, for these. Many of the books are inscribed by Johnny. We continue to have a large number of railway books in stock, as well as a wide selection of fiction.

From 30th November we have a special Christmas sale, with original art work, hand-made Christmas cards and children's knitwear as well as book bargains and Bute calendars. Why not support local artists when buying your Christmas presents?

The last day that we are open before Christmas is Saturday 19th December. We plan to re-open on Monday 18th January. This is earlier than usual, but people have more need of books while Covid restrictions last. Winter opening hours will be 11:00 am to 3:00 pm Monday to Saturday, but the shop may be closed if the weather is particularly bad. These arrangements are subject to variation in event of Covid restrictions requiring us to close the shop.

We are grateful to our customers for being very good at social distancing and remind everyone of the need to use hand sanitiser or wear disposable gloves, which we provide, before handling any books. All books are quarantined and cleaned before they go on display.

IN THE PRESS

The 21st October issue of *Rail* magazine included an article about piers served by railways, which said: Wemyss Bay pier is a rare success in the story of Britain's pier railways, due in no small part to the efforts of the Friends of Wemyss Bay Station. The railway portion of the station is especially picturesque, with its assortment of hanging and potted flowers, as well as a bar, booking hall and bookshop which form part of its amenities for visitors.

The magazine with the 7th November issue of *The Herald* included a feature on *10 of our favourite Scottish buildings*. In the company of such notable buildings as Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum, Rosslyn Chapel and Hill House, Helensburgh, was Wemyss Bay station. *The Herald* said: Forget blindly running through a train station and leaping on your train at the last second. At Wemyss Bay the station is a destination in itself, a 100-year-old category A listed building, the last remaining Clyde railway pier, that was created by James Miller in an ode to Edwardian design. It looks its best on a sunny day - if you can find one during the winter - when the sun comes pouring in through its curve glass canopies and onto the platform below. Thanks to the efforts of a local group of volunteers it is kept in pristine condition and was recently nominated for a World Cup of Stations award.

A LINK WITH THE PAST



We are delighted to welcome a new supporter, Norman Walker, who is a grandson of George Tait Christie, a former Station Master at Wemyss Bay. Mr Christie was in charge at Wemyss Bay from the early 1930s until he died shortly before the end of the Second World War. He had previously been Station Master at Crieff and before that at Wigtown. The family had to move out of the Station Master's house after he died, and settled in 1946 in Skelmorlie Castle Road. A photograph from our archive shows Mr Christie (back row, middle) at the station with many of his staff.

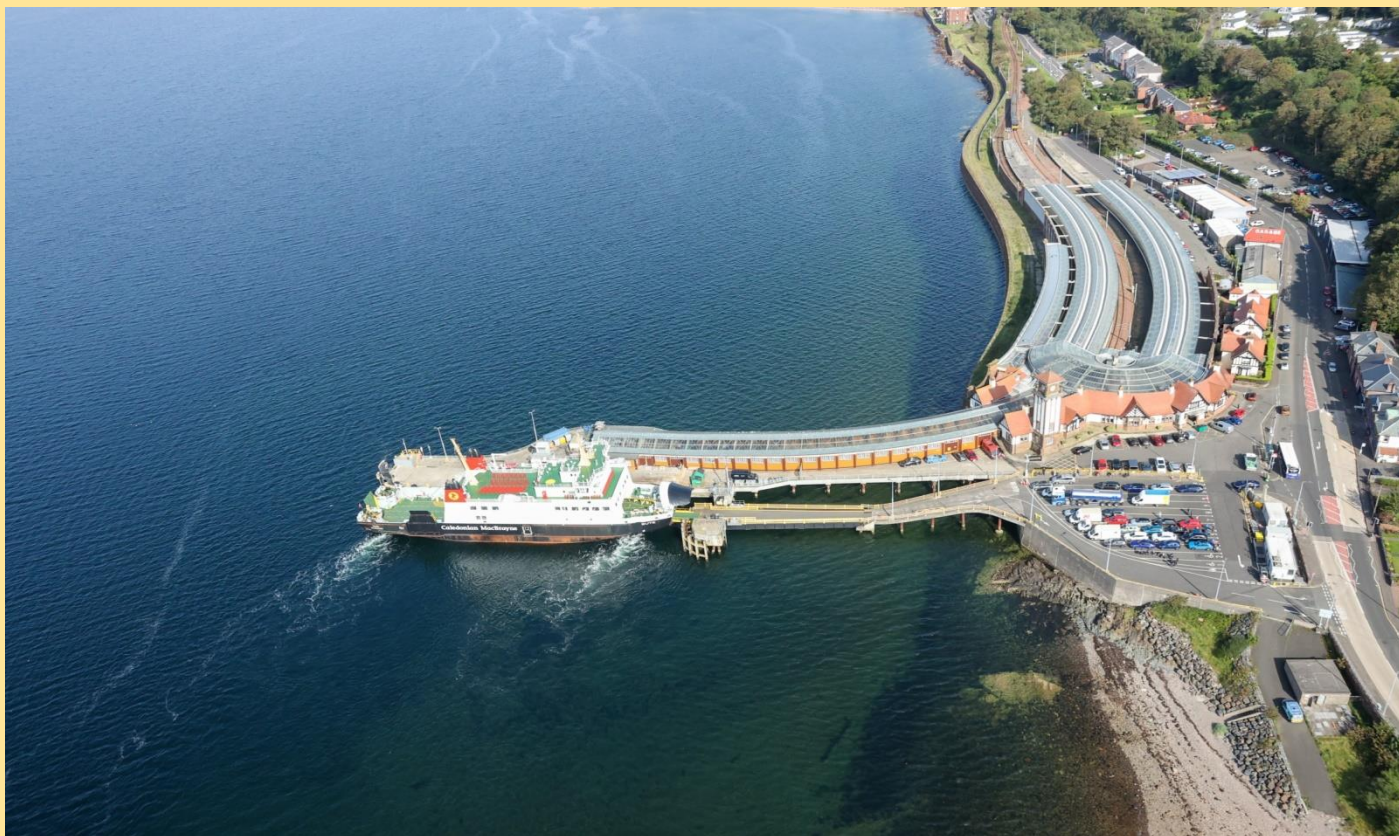
Gardening

We are looking forward to a spectacular floral display next spring. Cathy Galbraith and her helpers have been busy renewing soil in the towers on the concourse and planting bulbs. Hidden away across the station are daffodils, tulips, crocuses, muscari, alliums, bluebells and snowdrops, ready to cheer us up in the spring, when we hope happier times will return.

Doors Open Day

Like so many other events, Doors Open Day could not take place this year. That gives the public the opportunity to see inside many historic and architecturally distinguished buildings. Wemyss Bay station is open to the public daily, but we normally provide guided tours on Doors Open Day. This year, with our assistance, Visit Inverclyde filmed a "virtual tour" of the station, which has been published on-line. You can see it at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mRU9lhoidq0>





Network Rail makes increasing use of helicopters to inspect the railway. This is particularly useful for checking earthworks. Thermal imaging cameras can highlight electrical equipment that is faulty, so too hot, enabling it to be repaired and replaced before it fails. At the same time the crews can get spectacular shots of the railway, including this splendid view of Wemyss Bay, taken during the summer. MV *Bute* is berthing at the pier as the train arrives from Glasgow. The photograph particularly shows how the graceful curve of the platforms continues smoothly into the pier.

Scottish Haulier of the Year

The immaculately turned-out lorries of Bute-based John MacKirdy Limited are a familiar sight at Wemyss Bay, as they wait for the ferry. The company was founded in 1870 and remains a family-run business. It is responsible for much of the freight traffic to and from the island. We are pleased to report that John MacKirdy has won the Transport News award as 'Scottish haulage company of the year 2020'.

Waverley steams again – with our map



We were delighted to see PS *Waverley* back in service at the end of August, if only briefly. A new feature on board, in the entrance to the dining saloon, is a panoramic map of the Firth of Clyde. This was made from an image of our map displayed in the station entrance. A small plaque by the map on *Waverley* records our assistance.