

Britain's Best Loved Railway Station 2023



Some of our volunteers accept the Best Station award from Tim Dunn, with Stuart McMillan MSP left, Ronnie Cowan MP fourth from right and Tracy Stevenson, ScotRail's Community Development Executive second from right.

We are delighted that Wemyss Bay has been voted Britain's best loved railway station in 2023. This is the result of an online poll organised by the Rail Delivery Group and Community Rail Network. After winning two elimination rounds, Wemyss Bay was up against Denmark Hill station in London and Leamington Spa in the final. There were 3,271 votes for Leamington Spa and 7,441 for Denmark Hill, but an impressive 8,403 for Wemyss Bay. It is particularly appropriate to pick up the award this year – the 120th anniversary of the station building.

A plaque recording our win was presented by railway historian Tim Dunn at a ceremony on 9 June. We were particularly pleased to welcome Ronnie Cowan MP and Stuart McMillan MSP to the event. Both of them had encouraged their Twitter followers to vote for Wemyss Bay. Among others giving support online were ScotRail, Inverclyde Council, many local people and Buster the Rothesay Town Cat. We are grateful to them all. We also thank the railway, café and bar staff who help make the station so special. Our commiserations go to Pitlochry and Kilmarnock, who were eliminated in earlier rounds.

CONGRATULATIONS

The following motion was lodged in the Scottish Parliament by Paul O’Kane MSP and supported by fifteen others including Neil Bibby MSP, Ross Greer MSP and Stuart McMillan MSP:

That the Parliament congratulates Wemyss Bay train station on becoming 2023 champion of the World Cup of Stations; understands that the competition, which was held from the 22 to 26 May, set out to find the UK’s best loved station and saw 48 stations, chosen by historian, Tim Dunn, compete for the title; notes that Wemyss Bay accumulated an impressive 8,400 online votes in the final, which was enough to help it beat the worthy runners-up, Denmark Hill and Leamington Spa; further notes that the competition, which was held during Community Rail Week, is about highlighting the efforts of staff and volunteers who keep their local stations tidy, comfortable and aesthetically pleasing; congratulates the Friends of Wemyss Bay Station, a group that formed in 2009 with the aim of rejuvenating the station, for playing a huge part in the station’s achievements, including opening a station bookshop and developing a vibrant and colourful community garden; understands that Wemyss Bay train station has always been known for its striking appearance, and hopes that its status as a world cup champion will bring even more train enthusiasts, travellers, tourists and visitors to Wemyss Bay.

The Provost of Inverclyde, Drew McKenzie issued the following message:

This is a fantastic achievement for Wemyss Bay Station and also worthy recognition for the Friends of Wemyss Bay group and all they do to keep this icon of Inverclyde looking its absolute best all year round.

We’ve had a fantastic couple of weeks of Inverclyde being showcased across the UK and around the world with Gourock Pool featuring on the new Blur album cover, among other things, and now Wemyss Bay Station is grabbing the headlines and rightly so.

People have enjoyed and admired Wemyss Bay Station for over 100 years and this recognition of being crowned the best in the UK will, I’m sure, encourage many more people from near and far to discover what Wemyss Bay and Inverclyde has to offer.

Other messages included:

Excellent news. Thoroughly deserved. It’s a real gem we have in our community. Thank you to the Friends group for all the hard work you do.

Stuart McMillan MSP

Congratulations to Wemyss Bay railway station. Deserved winner of the World Cup of Stations.

Ronnie Cowan MP

Congratulations to all Friends of Wemyss Bay Station volunteers who help make sure Wemyss Bay is not only a stunning station, but somewhere the community can come together, feel proud & be part of something.

Jools Townsend, Chief Executive, Community Rail Network

Very many thanks to all of our supporters and bookshop customers who have helped us achieve this accolade!

INVERCLYDE HERITAGE FAIR



We were pleased to have a stand at Inverclyde Heritage Fair at the Watt Institution in Greenock on 20 May. This was organised by Inverclyde Heritage Network and brought together seventeen groups with an interest in local history. Renfrewshire Family History Society, Greenock Fire and Rescue Museum, Morton Community Trust and several church groups were among those present. It was interesting to talk with people from other organisations, as well as visitors.

Agnes McAuley and Simon Dell with our stand at Inverclyde Heritage Fair

COMMUNITY RAIL VISITORS

As part of Volunteers Week, we hosted a visit on 1 June by twenty two volunteers who are adopters of other ScotRail stations. The visitors were given a tour of the station and shown the work we have done, before lunch was provided in the café. Many took the opportunity to visit Rothesay as well. Thanks to ScotRail for arranging the visit.



Our visitors on 1 June were shown round the station by Greg Beecroft, in the fetching blue jacket now issued to ScotRail volunteers.

NEW BOOKSHOP SIGN

A new sign to draw attention to the bookshop was unveiled on 27 May. This is the work of artist Leo du Feu. It features books and flowers, both key features of our activities.

Leo is now working on a further commission from us, to be displayed on the poster board at the head of the pier. That will feature the voyage from Wemyss Bay to Rothesay.

Bookshop volunteers Brenda Campbell [R] and Sheena Inglis [L] with the new sign.



ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Our Annual General Meeting was held on 27 May. On behalf of the Committee, Simon Dell expressed thanks for the work of our gardeners, particularly Cathy and Stewart Galbraith, for their hard work in maintaining the floral displays. It remains a problem that we still do not have access to the outside tap, for watering plants, because of maintenance work in the area.

We are pleased that the ceiling and cornices in the bookshop have been repaired, so all of our space is back in use. Network Rail and their contractor, CPMS, are thanked for their efforts.

The bookshop continues to thrive with healthy book sales and donations. Storage space is at a premium.

Gladys Black retired as a bookshop volunteer during the year. She had been working in the shop since the Friends were founded in 2009. Simon thanked her and all of the other bookshop volunteers.

Public events during the year included performances on the concourse by Clyde Fiddlers and the Greenock Salvation Army Band. We arranged the customary station Christmas Tree.

We were pleased to welcome Tim Hedley-Jones, the new Executive Director of the Railway Heritage Trust to Wemyss Bay, and to have shared with the Trust the cost of renovating the clock tower clock, so it now shows the correct time. Thanks go to Network Rail for arranging the work. We have also had a pair of cigarette butt bins installed at the station entrance, in an effort to reduce the number of butts discarded into the chippings fronting the building.

Three Newsletters were issued to supporters during the year and we have been active promoting the station and our activities on social media, particularly Twitter and Facebook.

The healthy state of funds was reported and the Committee was re-elected.