

## Somerset & Dorset Railway Trust - PRESS RELEASE



### **S&DRT TOURING EXHIBITION TO MARK THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE CLOSURE OF THE RAILWAY**

7 March 2016

It was 50 years ago in 1966, on the evening of Saturday 5th March, that whistles and explosions shattered the peace of many towns and villages through Somerset and Dorset. Railwaymen were paying their last respects to the passing of the Somerset & Dorset Railway. As the final service train many of the stations, detonators were placed every few yards along the track and the locomotive's whistle sounded almost continuously. The line which had been part of the way of life for these country people for as long as they could remember would be no more.

The Somerset & Dorset Railway Trust has been given £58,000 from the Heritage Lottery Fund 'Our Heritage' programme to mark the 50th anniversary year with an exciting programme of travelling exhibitions, outdoor arts events, talks, walks and family friendly activities. The exhibition and associated events will visit a wide range of places at, or close to, former locations along the S&D railway line.

The Somerset and Dorset Railway (S&D) ran from Bath across the Mendips and through Dorset to Bournemouth, with branch lines across the Somerset levels to Burnham-on-Sea, Bridgwater and Wells. One of Britain's best loved railways, famous for its charm, quirky character and beautiful scenery, it closed in March 1966 after more than a century of service.

The travelling exhibition will visit over 30 locations throughout the Somerset and Dorset area over the course of the year, including Wells, Wimborne, Bridgwater, Radstock, Street and Sturminster Newton with support from local councils, museums, libraries, heritage groups and societies. The exhibition will explore the impact of the railway on local communities from its development, through its working life, since closure and also the work of the S&DRT in preserving and promoting its heritage.

Heritage Consultants, Focused Learning, have been working with the Trust to develop a range of family learning activities to accompany the travelling exhibition. Activities which include planning a route, the timetable challenge, system map puzzles, and mystery objects, are aimed at bringing alive the history of the S&D railway and encouraging a wider understanding of steam railway heritage.

The Somerset & Dorset Railway Trust is based at Washford Station on the West Somerset Railway where an extensive collection of memorabilia relating principally to the S&D is on display, including a working reconstruction of Midford Signal Box. Also at Washford is the Trust's collection of locomotives and rolling stock, some of which are under restoration. Entry to the Trust's museum is free to all visitors during the 2016 anniversary year.

For further details and full programme of events please visit <http://www.sdrt.org> or contact Louise Donovan, S&D 50 Project Coordinator [loudonovan16@gmail.com](mailto:loudonovan16@gmail.com) or 07947665961.

ENDS

### **Notes to editors:**

#### **The Somerset & Dorset Railway Trust <http://www.sdrt.org/>**

The Trust has its origins in the informal Somerset & Dorset Circle established in 1966, shortly before closure of the line. The Circle's first base from 1969 was the station and locomotive shed at Radstock. This site had to be vacated in the mid- 1970s and the Trust established the present museum and restoration centre on the West Somerset Railway (WSR).

In 1970 the Circle saved from a South Wales scrap yard one of two surviving former S&D freight locomotives built in 1925. This was subsequently restored by the Trust and it now regularly hauls passenger trains on the WSR. It is currently undergoing a fast-track overhaul ready for 2016.

Other significant items are three late 19th century wooden carriage bodies from vehicles built for use on the S&D and acquired by the Trust in 1986 and 1996. Trust volunteers completed restoring the exterior of one, First Class carriage no. 4 built in 1886, and are now working to complete its interior in time for the 50th anniversary.

The Trust holds a wide range of railway heritage items displayed in its museum at Washford. Items of rolling stock, the signal box from Burnham-on-Sea, goods office from Wells, and replica of the Midford signal box interior are also displayed at the site. The Trust has a significant collection of around 3,500 items of archival material deposited on loan at Somerset Heritage Centre where they are publicly available for study and research.

**For further information, images and interviews please contact Louise Donovan, S&D 50 Project Coordinator on 07947665961 or [loudonovan16@gmail.com](mailto:loudonovan16@gmail.com)**

#### **Heritage Lottery Fund**

Thanks to National Lottery players, we invest money to help people across the UK explore, enjoy and protect the heritage they care about - from the archaeology under our feet to the historic parks and buildings we love, from precious memories and collections to rare wildlife.  
[www.hlf.org.uk](http://www.hlf.org.uk) @heritagelottery