

## **Mid Norfolk Railway: Report to Yaxham Parish Meeting 2023**

The past three years have been difficult ones for the MNR, which, like most commercial enterprises, had very limited income for many months. Covid caused a complete shutdown in 2020, and a partial shutdown in 2021. In 2021, even though the very popular Polar Express was able to operate, the last week's trains had to be cancelled because many of the actors tested positive with covid.

Two factors other than covid have also made things difficult. The very wet weather followed by a long drought and excessive heat have caused deterioration of wooden structures especially, and a bridge at Crownthorpe needs to have major work done on it before it can be used. A public appeal has been launched to pay for this and so far it has been very well supported. Added to this, a large number of wooden sleepers have been replaced. Inflation has caused prices to rocket. Coal is now three times more expensive, and wooden sleepers have almost doubled in price.

However, there have been several highlights in 2021 and 2022. The famous 'Flying Scotsman' visited the MNR for several days, and was besieged by visitors at the station wanting to go in the cab to see how it worked. It ran several packed trains as far as Kimberley during its visit. A future visit is being looked into.

The Polar Express in 2022 ran between Dereham and Thuxton, passing through Yaxham. The station was brightly illuminated, as the Northern Lights, with a floodlit 'Hobo' sitting by his campfire on the platform. Thuxton was lit up as the 'North Pole', with Santa present. In all, 92 10-coach trains were run, carrying just over 42,000 people.

Less exciting but still important is the use of Dereham as a maintenance depot for the Railhead Treatment Trains between October and December. These are the trains that clear autumn's leaf fall from the tracks in East Anglia, thus avoiding trains skidding when trying to brake.

The railway intends to open between Dereham and Thuxton, a return journey of 11 miles, on April 29<sup>th</sup>. By then all necessary work between those places will be complete. There is a wide variety of events planned for the rest of 2023, with some new ones and many old favourites. Watch the website for details of these and for the date of release of Polar Express tickets.

John Hull 11<sup>th</sup> April 2023