

2019 ACoRP Award Entry  
Category 11 – Outstanding Volunteer Contribution

**Graham Ellis**

If you start a conversation about the train service in Melksham it is almost inevitable the name of Graham Ellis will be mentioned before long.

As a businessman in the town in 2005 he discovered, too late, that the service to his local station was to be reduced to two trains each way a day. With no previous experience of rail campaigning he quickly motivated a small group to start a long campaign to reintroduce, and maintain, a better service.

Thus Save the Train was founded. In its initial years it campaigned to raise awareness of the issues surrounding the service on the TransWilts line – which runs from Swindon to Westbury. Then from 2009 it turned its attentions to evaluate what a sustainable improved service would be before in the year prior to the new service being introduced in 2013 worked on ensuring the funding was in place for a three year trial.

During those years Graham worked tirelessly forging links with local community groups, Central Government, Wiltshire Council and First Great Western (now GWR).

Having very much started as a protest group Save the Train became more of a partnership with the rail industry and others. It also spawned the TransWilts Community Rail Partnership, which continues to campaign for the line, and the Coffee Shop internet forum ([gwr.passenger.chat](http://gwr.passenger.chat)). The forum is now 12 years old and provides a valuable archive documenting not only the struggles which went into improving the Melksham service but many other projects and talking points from the last decade. Contributors from both inside and outside the rail industry have documented the multi million pound redevelopment of Reading station, the redoubling of both the North and South Cotswolds routes and the electrification of the Great Western Mainline. Over 2,000 members have contributed over a quarter of a million messages on a wide range of topics. The MD of GWR has even been known to post comments on occasions!

Membership of the forum is free with no qualifications needed. Many join up to get advice on journeys they wish to make or the best fare for a particular trip. It usually isn't long before a fellow member posts a reply with the information they are seeking. For many this is an easier way to get informal advice rather than trying to wade through the various industry websites or talk to a call centre.

Started by Graham in 2007 it has been run out of his own pocket up till now. However having established itself as a useful resource it is now looking to raise its own funds but with Graham still very much the driving force behind it. The forum now has a committee and recently held its first AGM to approve the setting up of a bank account and agree a constitution. Graham has successfully applied for grants from GWR and other organisations. This will allow the software to be improved and provide sufficient finance for at least the next two years.

Having seen the improved Melksham service of eight trains each way a day start in December 2013, he has not sat back. He has continued to work with the Melksham Rail Users Group and the TransWilts CIC (which was born out of the TransWilts CRP) to maintain the service and look for further improvements.

He has also brought his experience to a wider audience. He is currently a director of both TravelWatch SouthWest and Railfuture. He has also been in demand to speak to other rail campaigning groups to share his knowledge and best practice.

In the last year he has helped to bring together a group of campaigners in Pewsey and helped them set up their own Rail Users Group which is now self-supporting.

A modest man, Graham will always remind people that much of his success has been a team effort. So it may have been, but he has been at the centre of it – cajoling, organising, encouraging, driving forward and mentoring those around him to get things done.

ENDS

## **Photos**

gelaunch.jpg – Graham Ellis helps to send away the first train of the improved TransWilts service – December 2013

gecrc.jpg – Graham Ellis leads a tour of the TransWilts line during the GWR Community Rail Conference 2018 – June 2018

geagm.jpg – Graham Ellis at the inaugural Coffee Shop AGM – June 2019

## **Documents**

Letter of support from Chris Hankin – administrator on the Coffee Shop Forum

Letter of support from Jane Jones – Head of Public Affairs - GWR

Chris Hankin  
6 St Agnes Close  
Nailsea  
North Somerset  
BS48 2UB

15 June 2019

07946 351653

Dear ACoRP,

2019 Award Entry - Category 11 – Outstanding Volunteer Contribution – Graham Ellis

I am writing to you in support of the nomination of Graham Ellis for this award.

Graham has been an inspiration to me for many years now. I first met him, appropriately enough, on a train taking us to Taunton to attend a meeting of TravelWatch SouthWest. His wide-ranging knowledge and experience of campaigning to improve not just railway travel but many other types of public transport was awesome to me, as a novice in such matters at that time. Since then, Graham has continued to startle me with his energy, enthusiasm, drive and determination to get things improved.

I joined Graham's online discussion forum, the Coffee Shop, in December 2007, and quickly realised that my own concerns over my frustratingly unreliable ten minute commute to Bristol were nothing compared with the struggle Graham was having, in those early days of 'Save the Train' at his local station, Melksham. While Graham clearly had the moral support of many other Melksham residents, and a team of experienced campaigners to call upon, I could see that it was Graham's commitment that kept things together, until the proposed reduction in train services for Melksham was not only stopped, but reversed.

While Graham is perhaps best known as the railway campaigner from Melksham, he continues to use his wide experience in support of other areas – bus services in Bath, ferry services to Ireland and Europe, airline services to just about anywhere, for example. This is done entirely in his own free time and generally at his own expense – he is a true 'volunteer'.

I wish Graham success in this particular category this year, and ask you to please consider his great contribution to all of the principles of community rail partnership, over many years now.

Yours sincerely,

Chris Hankin  
Administrator  
Coffee Shop forum



Bob Morrison  
Coffee Shop

Sent by email

Great Western Railway  
Milford House  
1 Milford Street  
Swindon, SN1 1HL

GWR.com

17 June 2019

Dear Bob

### **ACoRP Awards – Outstanding Volunteer Graham Ellis**

I am delighted that you are submitting Graham for the volunteer award this year. He works tirelessly for rail improvements and it will be great to see that recognised.

I am always very impressed by the time he takes to look at all aspects of a problem and to work with us, with Network Rail and with other local partners to get a solution that works. I know that this includes making himself available to Coffee Shop members when he is away, and also lendign a hand to new rail user groups as they start up.

This is very evident at Pewsey where I am quite sure that the local group would not be as far advanced as they are now without Graham's willingness to attend their meetings and offer advice on the complexities of the railway and the setting up of groups.

He has kept the Melksham Rail Users Group going through thick and thin, and when services were at their lowest it was Graham's enthusiasm and dedication that kept the issue alive – with the end result that services were not only restored but that the line was the fastest growing CRP line in the UK.

But while Graham has played a major role in Melksham and the TransWilts CRP, it is his work with the Coffee Shop that I note you are highlighting for this award, and that has been fabulous. It has gown from a small group raising concerns to a well informed source of feedback and information. A group that even boasts our MD Mark Hopwood among its members.

Now described by Graham as the UK's first virtual CRP, it uses technology to engage with the community right across our network, providing an online forum for discussion and for action. A forum that Graham has built through dogged determination and which he continues to build for the benefit of our customers and the communities we serve.

He is a very special member of the GWR CRP family and we would be delighted to see his hard work recognised.

Best wishes

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jane J.', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Jane Jones  
Head of Public Affairs