

Clifton Rocks Railway Restoration Annual Report 2009

Maggie Shapland, Restoration Officer



We have now been running group trips and open days under the new access rules from May 2008, after the Hotel changed hands in September 2007. The Hotel continue to provide our insurance and electricity. There is still a huge demand for trips down the tunnel, and we have averaged more than one trip a week this year.

We have still not taken down all the 675 people requesting trips from September Doors Open Day 2008 since up to January 2009 we were still catching up with cancelled trips for 468 people from the September 07 to May 08 closure. We have now gained another 85 from May and 418 from September 2009. Taking people on trips at 10 a time means that it will take a long time to show the 1000 down who are still on my list!

Many people organise their own groups- which is far easier for us. It is hard to do more than two trips in a week since most of us do have a full-time jobs and other commitments.

The Photographic Society display of pictures taken in December 2008 were well received, and the Hotel lets us use a room for exhibitions too during open days

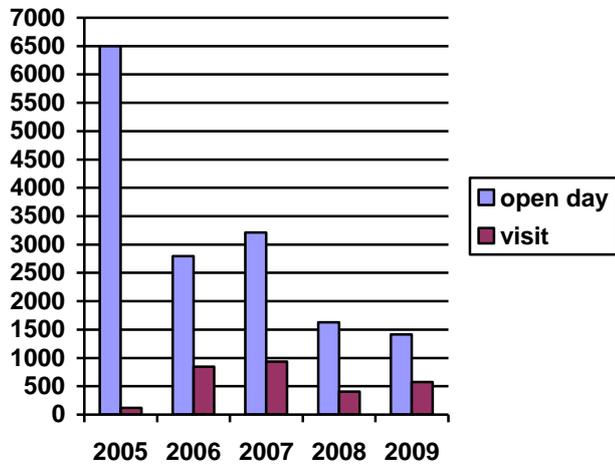
	2005	2006	2007 (to mid Sept)	2008 (from May)	2009
Open day visitors (May, Sept)	6500 (3500,3000) estimate	2797 (1132,1665)	3212 (1088, 2124)	1627 (380, 1247)	1417 (233, 1184). Only one day in May
Group trip visitors	117	843	935 (would have been 1400+)	406	575
Number of trips	9	41	48 (would have been 64+)	46	55
Hours spent on trips	30	225	229 (would have been about 315)	207	264
Work hours	1199	697	377 (would have been about 480)	36 (preparation for open day)	56
Number of volunteers helping	62	45	43	32 (10 help with group trips)	28

Description of group trips

- We have now taken several appreciative groups down for special birthday celebrations/ special family get togethers
- The Bristol Antiques Roadshow team who said: *I wasn't sure what to expect when we started the tour - but as our guide peeled back the layers of history inside the Clifton Rocks railway I felt like I was attending an architectural autopsy. The building and tunnels would have been interesting in their own right, but the use of the building as an air raid shelter and later as a BBC Radio base during WWII has made an impression on the fabric of the building which was fascinating. The narrow stairs that lead down into the tunnels are deceptive, doubling the impact of the wide high ceilinged sections that hang onto the side of the hill following the path of the tracks towards the portway. As we descended I could imagine what it must have been like, huddled in these dark tunnels during WWII air raids. Slightly more difficult to imagine was the arrival of a grand Piano, and BBC entertainment presenters in dinner jackets. The Radio studios are long gone, but with some imagination you can easily conjour up yet another period in the railway's colourful history. We enjoyed the tour very much.*
- Jon House leader of Bristol City Council, Barbara Janke and other councillors included a look round the top station on a tour round Clifton.
- GWE West held a joint event with the Hotel and us
- We had a photography session for local group Jetking for their first album cover
- As part of the University Positive Work Environment day, Mark Horton led about 50 staff from the Water Tower to the Clifton Club via the Observatory and the Railway.
- Other groups have been:

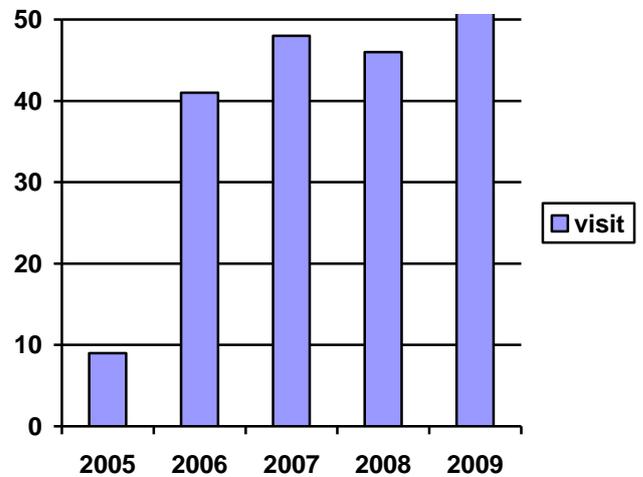
archaeological students; automative engineer; civic society; flickr; hockey group; mr williams; photographic society; plantain; primary health care; railfreight; railway ramblers; Rotary club; Serridge mining group; somerset walkers; Townswomens Guild; university H+S dept; Womens Institute. A historic buildings consultant also had a look round who has been interested in the site for many years.

year number of visitors



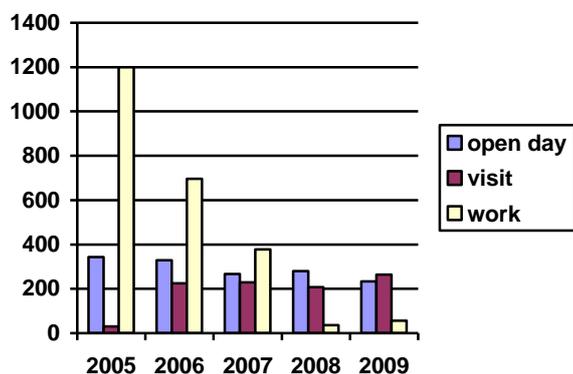
Number of visitors on open days have reduced, but revenue per head increased this year due to tours being guided rather than browsing. Number of visitors since 2008 is reduced due to only being able to take down 10 at a time

year number of trips



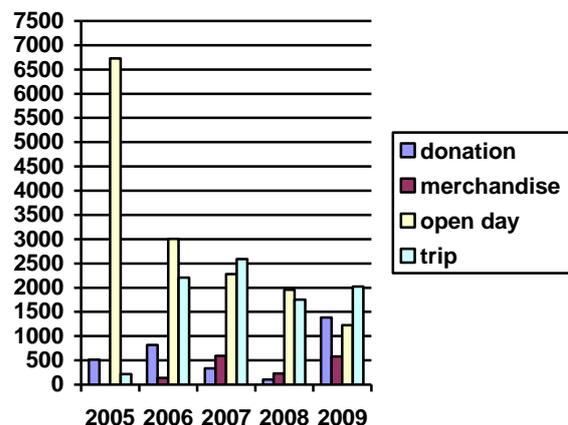
Record number of trips.

work hours



Hours doing trips now exceeds hours spent during open days. Work hours have obviously reduced since 2008 since we now just clean up for open days, and do some recording

year income from visitors



Now that we have made the tunnel accessible and safer, we are now getting more revenue from trips than open day (in 2005 merchandise was not separated). Clearly it is more time consuming. Open days are a good focus point and good for publicity. In 2009 we only opened up for one day in May instead of two.

Significant Events since last AGM

- We bought some exhibition boards and the Hotel allowed us to display them in the Hotel during Open Days and on a joint event. This allowed visitors to spend more time to discuss the project
- Bristol Photographic Society had two three hour sessions in the tunnel last December. We put some of the best photographs in the top station, and on the display boards for something new to see on open days. These greatly help illustrate what the shelters look like and are much admired.
- Bristol Flickr group (online photo management and sharing application) also had three photographic sessions and put their photos on www.flickr.com
- Richard Clutterbuck – who has been a volunteer a couple of times, is a freelance cameraman, often working for BBC. He took some footage of Norman Thomas who returned to sing the song he had sung at a Christmas Party in the tunnel in 1942.
- Peter Williams, a professional photographer, approached us to take pictures of the Railway, having been commissioned by the Colston Hall redevelopment project. Some pictures may be used in the Museum of Bristol Project.
- A group of us visited Temple Meads WWII shelters
- A bequeath asked for money to be donated to the Railway instead of for flowers
- The BBC wanted to use the Railway for Casualty and for other films. Sadly this was not possible.
- A trip down the Railway was auctioned for £75 by the Bulgarian Partners Trust to raise funds.

Open days in 2009

- May: had 233 visitors but we were only open on Sunday rather than the weekend. Thanks again to the bus drivers at the harbourside bus rally which meant that numerous vintage buses disgorged passengers every half an hour. The weather was wet in May and fantastic in September. Everyone was very complimentary about all the hard work we had put into the project, many had come back to see progress
- September: Another very successful sunny Doors Open Day with nearly 1200 visitors (670 Saturday, 514 Sunday). Everybody was so full of praise- it was very gratifying. Mummers performed outside as part of a series of stops associated with Brunel.

Next open days

- May 16 (free bus trips plus bus rally at Lloyds Amphitheatre on Sunday).
- Sept 11/12 Doors Open Day

Oral History

- We advertised in the Evening Post and several people came forward.
- We filmed and interviewed one person who used the refuge area in the War
- We also interviewed the grandson of George George who was the gangmaster when the Railway was built
- We still have several more to talk to from Open Days

Education

- Three students from the University of Bristol Archaeology Department are doing heritage projects this year.

Publicity

- In May: Venue, BS8, Clifton, Evening Post, Clifton and Hotwells Improvement Society newsletter
- In September: Evening Post
- In November: Somerset Life
- An article in Civic Society newsletter was published in January giving our progress and aspirations
- Heritage Railways have written an article about the Railway in a book about 20 unusual railways- "Britain's Wierdest Railways". It was published in November and is available from WH Smith.
- Pictures of progress continue to be put on the web sites which bring in emails asking for information and group trips.

Survey

- I have now received 281 surveys back (last analysis written up in January 09). They clearly show that the people who have been down the tunnel appreciate the World War II history better.

- Many confirm the CRR group's views about the future use as preserving the WWII history and keeping the site as a museum, railway running possibly part of way, including a visitor from English Heritage. WWII is on the school curriculum and will attract funding. They say it was totally unrealistic to consider that the Railway would ever run as a transport system and that the WWII history was as important as the Railway:
 - *very interesting day. Great that it is an attraction made possible through volunteers- the passion for it is infectious*
 - *Loads of potential- very evocative seeing shelters and imagining times during war- very special. I would love to see both station entrances and ticket hall restored, plus a carriage rebuilt to see at top of tunnel with some explanation of how railway worked, then focus on WW2 stories and BBC area. Would BBC be interested in supporting restoration/ interpretation of BBC area? Certainly useful for accessing publicity of project! Local community involvement has loads of potential too*

Tantalising Finds

People have told us about objects relating to the Railway – such as a sign languishing in a garden somewhere in Somerset. There is also a clock presented on the first day of opening- this may come up for sale one day.

Temperature

We have been recording the temperature in the tunnel since January. The bottom shelter is usually about 2 degrees cooler than the top shelter.

	Shelter 1	Shelter 3
Jan	38F	
Feb	44F	
March	48F	
April	50F	
May	56F	
June	60F	57F
July	60F	58F
August	60F	58F
September	58F	57F
October	58F	57F
November	52F	50F

The Way Forward

We want to get some grants to do some surveys, and for archaeologists to record the barrage balloon and BBC rooms

Thanks

Thank you to everyone who has helped to make the Railway such a success this year. This year 28 different volunteers have helped with open day and group trips. We gained two more volunteers who thoroughly enjoyed themselves.

Most of our time has been taken in doing trips and open days. Many thanks to the volunteers helping so diligently with the group trips (especially my stalwart Mike Taylor and Peter Davey). I thank in particular those who helped me guide the visitors through the top station during open days. Guiding all day was very exhausting and the more that helped made it easier for everyone. We could not have got through the numbers wanting to visit without them. I also wish to thank Nicky for organising the photographic trips which have provided such stunning photographs.

We also wish to thank the Avon Gorge Hotel for their continued support, for supplying our electricity and insurance, their friendly receptionists, and for supplying a room for our meetings. The use of a room for both Open Days was particularly appreciated.