

# THE

# FRESHFORD

# STORY

The enchanting village of Freshford is the first stop on the Heart of Wessex Line after the First Great Western train leaves Bath Spa and travels south through the glorious Limley Stoke valley. The station has been transformed since the local community adopted it in 2007, and there has been much to celebrate over the years since then. On Wednesday 7th August 2013 we will gather again to inaugurate the re-installation of a piece of railway history, and to celebrate the dedication, enthusiasm and hard work of local people who have taken the station into the heart of their community.



The story should really begin with the station gardens established in 2007, inspired by the Vaisey sisters who had created and tended gardens at the station in the 70s and 80s. A wonderful new landscaping plan included herbaceous plants donated by village residents, a group of children from Freshford School who grew plants from seed for the garden, and old railway sleepers to delineate different areas in the central part of the garden (First Great Western helped by sourcing and delivering these). The station gardens continue to be nurtured and developed by members of the Freshford community.

Chapter two opened in 2009 when a resident in Kingswear, Devon, came across this picture of the station in Alan Dodge's book: "Freshford", a comprehensive history of the village published in 2000. He recognised the Running In Board on the right of the photo, as it was just then sitting in his garden in Devon! A rescue mission was

mounted and the 120 year old sign was brought back and restored by a local craftsman. It was then re-installed at the station and unveiled in July 2010.



Meanwhile, on 28th May 2010, Freshford Parish Council had received an email from a dealer in old signs in Bristol...

"....have recently received a genuine platform enamel sign for FRESHFORD. It dates from 1900-ish. Measures 13 feet long by 18 inches, made in two parts, 7 feet and 6 feet. I can sell the FORD part of the sign without problem. Just thought it might be of interest to return it to the village where it once came from if you are interested. Please let me know if I have contacted the right people...."

He had!



Nick Stevens, Chairman of Freshford Parish Council, takes up the story

*“The Parish Council was in the fortunate position of enjoying some excellent and vital connections within the railway industry and had recent experience of the just completed restoration of an earlier Freshford Sign (circa 1885) found in Devon and re-installed at Freshford. The Councillor for Bathavon South was Neil Butters, Secretary to the Railway Heritage Committee, and members of the Parish Council (Hugh Delap and Nick Stevens) supported and attended Community Rail meetings of the Heart of Wessex Rail Partnership, which under the dynamic direction of Catherine Phillips has invigorated the Heart of Wessex Line and developed the concept of community voluntary workers helping to maintain and enhance local railway stations. The partnership has a special fund to support this type of project and had indeed been instrumental in the costs of restoration of the other sign. It was confirmed that support for the second Running In Board could come from this fund, and First Great Western enthusiastically agreed to its reinstallation at the station. Armed with this network of support the Parish Council moved quickly to propose the purchase of the sign at a cost of £250 and to raise funds to conserve the sign and restore it to Freshford Station....”*

The Community Rail Working Party (CRWP) meeting mentioned by Nick also came into its own to help with checking the provenance of the sign, as Roger Newman, who participates in the CRWP as Chairman of the West Wiltshire Rail Users Group, was able to follow up with his own contacts – including the railwayman who had actually taken the sign down in the sixties!



More progress on the investigation in this email from Neil Butters:  
“It was astonishing when the second historic sign - this time made from enamel - turned up just a few months ago! For some while there was doubt as to whether it was in fact the same sign that had existed all the way through from c 1900 to c 1968 - the reason being that the letters

were relatively thick pre-1948 and now; but thin during BR days. To solve this puzzle I arranged for Nick and I to see a remarkable guy called Tim Petchey who runs a small railway museum in his back garden in Winchcombe - Tim being the leading authority in the country on railway signage. Tim had the answer straightaway: the British Transport Commission (BTC) - who ran British Railways from 1948 through to 1962 - had adopted a common set of rules for station signage in 1948, involving thinner lettering. The sign had therefore been repainted. The reason the letters were now thicker again was that paint stripper had been used to remove all this paint!

The next challenge for Freshford Parish Council was to secure funding to cover conservation work on the sign, and to find the right people to do that work. The former came from the Friends of Freshford and Bath & North East Somerset Council - most significantly from the Ward Councillors' Initiative Scheme – with some additional help from their Heritage Services. The University of Cardiff stepped in with the expertise required to prepare the board for a second lease of life on the station, and it set off on its travels again to take up temporary residence amongst significantly older artefacts in the Cardiff University laboratory (witnessed by Nick in this photo taken on a visit in 2012)



The final stage of the project will be the installation of the sign at the station, complete with a suitable frame, ready for its inauguration on Wednesday 7th August by Cllr Neil Butters, Chairman of Bath & North East Somerset Council.

**Freshford Parish Council** and the **Friends of Freshford** have taken the leading role in the adoption of Freshford Station, making many funding and practical contributions to projects over the years. **The Heart of Wessex Rail Partnership** – a joint venture between seven local authorities and **First Great Western** - allocates 15% of its annual budget to projects led by community groups, and grants to Freshford have included support for the station gardens, a community noticeboard, installation costs for both Running in Boards and commemorative plaques. Substantial additional support for the second heritage Running In Board was supplied by **Bath & North East Somerset Council**, and the conservation of the sign has been undertaken by **Phil Parkes**, Senior Conservator, and **Nicola Emmerson**, Conservator, of **Cardiff University**. The work to re install both signs at the station is by **Honeyfield Property Services**.