

SOUTH WEST

Avonmouth Port Tour & Bristol Pilots Lecture



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Eleven members visited The Bristol Port Company facilities at Avonmouth. The visit comprised a presentation from John Chaplin, Director of External Affairs & Special Projects, followed by a tour of the port area, on both sides of the Avon, hosted by Katherine Lovell, PR & Communications Executive.

Avonmouth Port comprises of two dock areas on the north and south sides of the Avon where the river enters the Bristol Channel. To the north of the river is the Royal Edward Dock and Avonmouth Container Terminal and to the south the Royal Portisbury Dock. The port employs 500 people in its own right and a further 9,000 people work within the port estate. It is well connected by road to the M5, M4 and M49 and rail to the main lines running east/west and north/south. Adjacent to the port is the rapidly developing industrial and logistics zone of Avonmouth & Severnside, which houses major operations for The Range, Amazon, Lidl, Royal Mail and others.

After the port tour, Tony Anderton and Alan Coombes, Bristol Pilots, gave a fascinating insight into the work of ships pilots, working with some of the highest tidal ranges in the world, rising and falling up to 14m twice a day. The tidal range at Bristol results in small windows of time, sometimes as little as 20 minutes, to take the largest vessels into and out of either of the two locks that control the water levels at the berths.

Ships are met off Barry, near Lundy Island, in the Bristol Channel by the Pilot Cutter in all weather conditions, every day of the year, at all times of day. Pilots take over the conduct of the vessel from the ship's captain. The pilot also controls any tugs that are in attendance. However, the pilots' liability for the vessel is limited by law to £1,000 plus their fee, even though it is a legal requirement for vessels above a certain length to use a pilot entering and leaving Bristol Port.

Speed is critical. A large ship will take a long time to slow down and stop, but needs way to steer. There are no predetermined rules or guidelines for the pilot. Every vessel is different, and the weather conditions and tide make each entrance and exit to port unique. For the largest vessels, the clearance through the lock can be less than 50cm and damage to the lock gates will close the port to traffic. Pilots must use their judgment. In addition to excellent spatial awareness, they will have many years of experience as a Master Mariner before starting, what can be 10 years of training, to become a full Unrestricted Pilot.

There have been pilots at Bristol for over 500 years and for many years the skills were handed down within a few families all living in the village of Pill on the southern shore of the Avon. Now pilots are recruited internationally to become part of the limited liability partnership that is Bristol Pilots.

Hitachi Rail Depot, Stoke Gifford

Thirty members visited Hitachi Rail Europe's (HRE) newly built £80 million depot at Stoke Gifford, Bristol. The depot houses the new fleet of Class 800 InterCity Express Trains currently being introduced on the Great Western Main Line and employs 150 staff. As well as housing the new fleet, work carried out at the depot includes readying trains for passenger services, inspecting the fleet and servicing it.

Andrew Penrose, Head of Drivers at Great Western Railway (GWR) and Gary Martin, Manager of the Train Maintenance Centre, HRE, jointly hosted the event, which had been organised by committee member Colin Rees. Andrew Penrose gave a presentation describing the new trains and GWR's experience of introducing them into service, whilst Gary Martin presented details of the work undertaken at the depot. The presentations were followed by a tour of the new maintenance workshop, with a chance to go onboard one of the new trains.

The depot site is approximately triangular, 16ha (40 acres) in area and is formed by boundaries created by the junction of four railway lines close to Bristol Parkway station.

The Intercity Express Train is a type of bimodal train being introduced on the Great Western and the East Coast main lines, replacing the Class 43 High Speed Trains introduced in the 1970s. The Class 800s are powered by electric traction motors capable of operating on electrified track using overhead wires and unelectrified track using diesel generators. The trains are based on the Hitachi A-train design and are being assembled at the Hitachi Newton Aycliffe facility, from body shells shipped from the Kasado plant in Japan. Work commenced at Newton Aycliffe in 2014 and the first units entered service on the Great Western Main Line in October 2017. They are programmed to start entering service on the East Coast Main Line from December 2018.

The new trains offer a step change in passenger experience with more seats available and modern technology. A total of 80 train sets will be constructed, with 36 five-car and 21 nine-car units intended for operation with Great Western Railway, plus 10 five-car and 13 nine-car with London North Eastern Railway. In addition to the Stoke Gifford depot, Hitachi will also maintain the GWR Class 800 fleet at the North Pole depot in London and at Swansea.

UPCOMING EVENT

TRANSFORMING SUPPORT DELIVERY ACROSS THE UK MILITARY

29th January 2019

Plymouth University, Mast House, Shepherd's Wharf, 24 Sutton Road, Plymouth PL4 0HJ