

TAKING NOTICE

by Rob Hebron

Notices, posters and signs at railway stations are so commonplace that we don't realise how effective they are. "Part of the furniture" is a very apt description. The fact is that each category is an essential contribution to directional information or Health and Safety. Modern electronic information screens cannot convey the entire spectrum of journey opportunity. They are visual but not inspiring to the imagination. The dot matrix lettering is flexible but totally standard.



Posters and enamel advertisements adorn the station building at Wootton (IOW)

From the very early days of railways, the management needed to post notices of forthcoming excursions, diversions and cancellations. Such temporary affairs would take the form of a poster. Very often, the station master would produce a suitable declaration on paper. It might be a printed poster with a random mix of typefaces or even a swift handwritten, attention-grabbing communication.



A collection of railway posters pictured at Hampton Loade on the Severn Valley Railway

The Great Western Railway and other large companies recruited professional artists to produce iconic posters. Their intention was to lure the population to seaside resorts and other places of interest. In some cases, a little artistic licence and marketing were employed, whereby Cornwall was titled "The Cornish Riviera", giving it a little more exotic flavour. Original railway posters are very collectable and valuable, perhaps because they seem to refer back to halcyon days. Pasted onto wooden poster boards, many posters were not recoverable and few genuine examples survive. Nevertheless, there is a considerable demand for reprints, suitably framed.



An abundance of signs at Bridgnorth station

Equally collectable are cast iron notices, favoured by the GWR for more permanent messages. Very often these plaques were used to draw attention to by-laws, railway practices and etiquette. Many have found their way to heritage railways and the information thereon is still relevant.

