

DARTMOOR RAILWAY
ASSOCIATION

The Dartmoor Pony

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Dartmoor Railway Association**

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Network Rail Fieldwork

The Dartmoor Pony

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The views expressed in the newsletter are not necessarily those of the Dartmoor Railway Association.

FRONT COVER: Group photo of the Network Rail graduates who visited Okehampton for fieldwork in July (Photo: Sue Baxter).

BACK COVER: Top: LNER Thompson Class B1 61306 'Mayflower' at Exeter St David's on one of its regular trips hauling the English Riviera Express to the southwest during summer 2024 (Photo: Dave Ellis). Bottom: The coaling block flowerbed - hopefully enjoyed by most motorised visitors as they go round the roundabout! Starring Alpine Geraniums and Hot Lips! (Photo: Sue Baxter).

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Chairman's Report for the Dartmoor Railway Association **Annual General Meeting**

Sue Baxter

It is pleasing to reflect that this is the year we have become officially recognised as a key organisation at Okehampton Station.

Volunteers have been helping ever since the reopening in 1997, and DRA have been occupying part of the Network Rail (NR) main station since October 2022. However our tripartite lease including Great Western Railway (GWR) which leases the station from NR was only concluded on 15th January 2024. It was a legal marathon with language more appropriate to a large organisation such as Wetherspoons rather than a small voluntary organisation. We now have a tenancy for 6 years which started in 2022. It is worded in such a way that there will not need to be any major changes to the lease in the future, even if GWR morphs into another train operator. We have to pay the rent four times a year, on precise dates, with a peppercorn.

Storm Henk on 2nd January was a less happy event for us. You will all no doubt have the unwelcome image in your mind of how strong gusts, perhaps 64 mph, removed most of the very heavy corrugated iron roof, which we believe dated back to the original construction in 1878. It caused minor damage to the Platform 2 roof which we had professionally repaired and then our gang replaced the broken gatepost. We have since spoken to many bridge engineers and it appears that Devon County Council (DCC) is willing to have it reopened as it is now as the basic structure is sound. However some work has to be done to secure the exposed structure against rain ingress, as it was originally a covered design.

As volunteers at the station we are continually kept on our toes as we are respected as sources of information about the bus and rail services. So it was good to celebrate in November the second anniversary of restarting daily services knowing that we are helping the station achieve about 30,000 passenger journeys every 4 weeks. The various machines are working much better now.

All the 130 Exeter depot drivers are kept passed out on our route. However we have still had some strikes, some cancelled trains and memorably one train that arrived a little late after leaving St Davids for Okehampton, in the Waterloo direction up to Central, to get round a trackside signalling issue. This week the issue was a car parked in a way that blocked the top of Station Road for large vehicles so two doubledeckers and a single decker bus could not move for about 4 hours. However we could direct cars round by Brandize. Some volunteers have been known to remove their GWR pink hi-vis if they need to make a quick getaway!

The Arthur Westlake Museum has benefited from a repaint and some new artifacts, such as a warning sign and a Southern Railway map. Upstairs we have a growing archive of photos, maps, plans and articles, all being digitally recorded.

The Signal Box is the hideaway of choice during *Soakampton* days for those who are dextrous. A model railway layout of Okehampton is emerging. Based, at first, on a donated layout it has already gained a large 1920 engine shed, and a terrace of Meldon railway cottages are ready to go up above the viaduct. The large turntable is ready in place for turning the steam engines.

At Meldon we have moved a little further forward since February towards the lease on the Class 08 locomotive, and a licence on the sheds and sidings. A very positive line of communication is open with Aggregate Industries (AI) and the final issues are being resolved. In the meantime you can see that we shielded Lab 11 with bespoke covers at the start of the winter.

We have also had two excellent Community Rail Days at Meldon Station with GWR and NR volunteers working alongside DRA. The impact viewed from the Granite Way running alongside is of a station which is looked after, the shelter painted, platform and immediate track clear of weeds and saplings. Even a white line along the platform edge! Keeping the aim of taking the heritage service back to Meldon Viaduct Station firmly in view.

The Station and the DRA website have received awards this year. We have a lovely plaque from The National Railway Heritage Awards. It is the Community Award from the industry for the Okehampton Station Main Building. The Waiting Room and others had their 1920 parquet floors brought up to best condition in time for the final judging in the summer. At the Railfuture Awards the DRA website was praised for the ease of movement through all the different areas and the comprehensive nature and attractiveness of the information, especially historical.

The way forward for the coming year:

1. To complete the licence on the Signal Box and get the model layout to a safe condition ready to invite the public in on some days.
2. To maintain and improve all areas of the station inside and out. Shop, Museum, Gardens, and Platforms. Weather permitting, the fences are a target.
3. To complete the agreements with AI at Meldon and move stock inside the Carriage and Wagon Shed.
4. To engage with the Okehampton Interchange Station as stakeholders to help deliver another successful service.
5. To welcome more volunteers to our band of 18 regulars each month, for one or two days a week or one or two days a month or doing homeworking projects.

Thank you to all members for their subscriptions and continuing support. To all the volunteers who clean, litter pick, paint, stock the shop, check the jigsaw puzzles, bake a cake, grow seedlings, create models, manage the website, loan artifacts and organise the stores. DRA is the sum of all its parts. They are all pretty good judging by the lovely accolades we receive for the station, and the confidence people state they have in how we will continue to keep it as one of the best stations in the country.

Chairman's Update

Sue Baxter

200,000 passenger journeys were recorded by the end of the first 6 months of this year. 258,000 were recorded for the whole of the first year of operation and the number of people enjoying the service is steadily increasing. This continues to reflect how people enjoy both the shorter and longer distances that they can travel in comfort. I have the sense that both younger and older members of the community are making more journeys than they would otherwise have done to visit and meet up with friends and family and make outings. Equally the number of suitcases indicates a rise in people planning much longer journeys.

Interesting asides include a gentleman telling me that it was a “down memory lane” visit for him as he last made the trip as an evacuee from London. He remembered Okehampton and Halwill Junction and so many other “tiny stations” that he passed through on his way to Padstow where he then lived for several years. For another gentleman it was the completion of a challenge, given to him in the form of a book “decades ago” to see Britain’s 50 finest rail journeys. He was really chuffed with his final destination, and determined to come back and walk the Granite Way to Meldon.

The footbridge has a few poppies flowering on its steps, but is otherwise kept weed free as the months go by. Another contractor has been over it to give a quote. We have pressed for its reopening, obviously, as it slows down our volunteer activities around the station and has diminished the number of people accessing the Museum on Platform 2, which we can now only open on Saturday and Wednesday, when there are volunteers based on Platform 2. Devon County Council have had difficulty getting an undertaking that the work will be done in a reasonable time scale, but they are determined to get their design implemented for securing the remaining (to shoulder height) structure and making it good for future maintenance. I am looking forward to the time when the station feels complete and open once again, people standing on the bridge taking photos, admiring the view and watching trains coming into view up the incline from Fatherford.

We have been delighted to have another visit from the Railway Heritage Trust. Okehampton Station was the lucky recipient of much grant aid from them, sought out by Richard Burningham of the Devon and Cornwall Rail Partnership, for the heritage refurbishment of the interior of the station building in 2022, before it reopened to the public. Tim Hedley-Jones MVO, Executive Director of the Railway Heritage Trust, last visited in 2020 and was delighted to see the results in person. He was keen for us to consider applying again for a grant should we have any future project. One such could be interpreting more of the station site. In particular displaying the spindle from the former 50 foot turntable somewhere near its original position at the end of the car park in front of the former engine shed. The GSMR mast marks the end of the shed floor area which is now used during rail maintenance.



You will have heard this before, but things really are moving at Meldon! The Carriage and Wagon shed is now empty apart from our Southern Brake Van and the 08 shunter. There are two new roller shutter doors on the shed which means it is once more secure and safe. The 08 has been started, used and has a good second hand set of batteries. Aggregate

Industries Legal Department have asked for some final details for the lease and licence.

In July, 33 Network Rail graduates were brought to Okehampton Station as part of a “fieldwork” day by Christian Irwin, now in charge of Capital Projects Delivery for the West Coast mainline from Euston to Gretna, and Matt Barnes, Head of Strategic Service development at GWR. They had also seen the work done at Dawlish following the disaster. The graduates had placements all over the country in different rail departments and it was a pleasure to meet them at the start of their careers and try to answer their thoughtful questions. “Why did you start volunteering?” I answered honestly that I was looking to do something outside and started cleaning the green algae off the fences by the Ladies loo back in 2006. I first saw the station in a derelict state in 1975. It felt good to be helping keep a lovely station attractive not long after it had been brought back into service in 1997 by Devon County Council.

During an informal visit by Derek Beer, Chairman of Stations in Bloom Competition for the Blackmore Vale Community Rail Partnership Area, the first question he asked your Chair and Secretary was “What are you doing about your succession?” We knew what he meant, it’s the broader picture making sure we encourage younger members of our wider community to also enjoy what we have.

A challenge to everyone, members and volunteers. Please think about this and see if you can inspire or even give confidence to someone else to feel they can make a difference, have fun and widen their friendships by joining us. Thank you!

The Bookstall on Platform 3

We welcome donations of railway books, railway miscellanea, model railway items, paperbacks and hardback books, and railway DVDs.

Contact Christine Horner for further details:

christine.horner@talk21.com

Membership & Volunteer Matters

Geoff Horner, Membership Secretary/Volunteer Coordinator

Membership numbers have risen since the last report and now stand at 167 including a number of new members whom it is a pleasure to welcome.

- Martin and Jane Wilcox of St. Agnes
- Ian Barrett of Bishopsteignton
- Haydon Waroman of Okehampton
- Simon Roseveare of Kidderminster

Sadly we have learnt of the death of the following members. Our condolences go to their families.

- Robin Townshend
- David Bell
- James Lawrence

Our dedicated and hard working volunteers have continued to be busy around the station and museum rooms, their hard work rewarded by the frequent favourable comments received from passengers and visitors. The book/gift shop reports steady business and now has a number of customers who pay regular visits. Pre-read railway books or any other railway related items are always welcome to maintain the stock so if you have anything you would like to pass on please do get in touch.

The Carriage & Wagon situation at Meldon is at present unchanged. However we understand that AI are now actively preparing a lease/licence agreement which we anticipate will soon be passed to us for signature.

Sadly, we have to report that David Bell died in early August, having endured difficult times recently. David was a Carriage and Wagon (and occasional Station Maintenance) volunteer with DRA for 9 years, very successfully applying engineering skills acquired in a career in the Army (REME) and the Royal Air Force.



David Bell in the driving cab of 'Rocket' on 14th January 2018. Photo: John Coxon

Latterly he wrote and illustrated excellent reports on C&W activity for our website. His calmness, fund of tales and occasional tendency towards rebellion will be sorely missed. We offer our condolences to David's family.

David Bell – An Appreciation

By members of the Meldon Carriage & Wagon team

David joined DRSA/DRA some 9 years ago having retired from his service career first in the army and then in the RAF.

David was a keen and enthusiastic member of the C&W team at Meldon whose skills and expertise were invaluable in tackling the often challenging tasks which came our way in the restoration and servicing of our DRA rolling stock and stock belonging to Dartmoor Railway. The latter often in response to the cry of 'we need it on tomorrows train'!



The photograph shows David (sitting right) as the C&W team will remember him enjoying a well earned break at the shed doorway chuffing away on a cheeky ciggy and sharing anecdotes of army and RAF life from around the world.

Unflappable and cheerful David was a pleasure to know and work with.

DRA Members' Socials

Dates for upcoming DRA social evenings at the Taw River Inn, Sticklepath, Okehampton, EX20 2FG. Held on the first Wednesday of each month starting from 18:30. All DRA members are welcome!

- Wednesday 4th September 2024
- Wednesday 2nd October 2024
- Wednesday 6th November 2024
- Wednesday 4th December 2024

DRA Members' Library

At Okehampton Station we are accumulating a decent collection of books on (mostly) West Country railway themes. Current local DRA members are welcome to borrow from the library. The latest list is shown here:

<https://www.dartmoor-railway-association.org/library>

Please contact us on info@dartmoor-railway-association.org if there's anything you are interested in – please don't just turn up at the station unannounced.

Please note that this is a new initiative and we haven't yet sorted out the finer details of how it will operate.

The Bookstall

Our DRA shop, 'The Bookstall', on Platform 3 at Okehampton station opens on Wednesdays, Fridays, Saturdays, Sundays and Holiday Mondays throughout the year thanks to the dedicated team of volunteers who make this possible.

As well as the varied selection of 'previously loved' railway books and DVD's available in the shop, new railway book titles are available to order online via the DRA website:

<https://www.dartmoor-railway-association.org/shop>

The shop also stocks a selection of local hand crafted candles, glassware, jewellery, cards etc which make ideal gifts. There is also a selection of DRA and Dartmoor Line souvenirs. Do visit the shop when you are in Okehampton.

Okehampton Model Railway

Ron Kirby

A group of Dartmoor Railway Association volunteers have joined together to form a model railway group and are building an OO gauge layout of Okehampton Station and the surrounding area.

The layout will consist of Okehampton Station circa 1965, plus the Military Sidings, the Camp Bridge, Meldon Viaduct and Fatherford Viaduct. It will also feature a large fictitious station and sidings at the rear for storage of trains, coaches and trucks.



Simon Arnold helped us on our way with a generous donation of an OO gauge model railway of Okehampton station - this included all the layout boards with track etc. Since the donation we have extended the layout boards to 5.5 metres x 2.5 metres and are now in the process of planning the layout to include the above scenes.

This will be a long process but an enjoyable one.

As soon as we have the permission from Network Rail we will open the doors for the public to watch the build and be involved in the build.

If anyone has any model railway trains, coaches, buildings or anything to do with model railways they would like to donate please contact me, Ron Kirby, by email: ybrikmr@gmail.com

If you are up at Okehampton Station call in to our DRA shop on Platform 3. We are open on Wednesday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday. Also, on Wednesdays and Saturdays you can visit the Museum on Platform 2. There you can see an earlier model of Meldon Viaduct in Room 2. Also in Room 1 there are, at present, OO gauge models of a West Country Pacific and an N Class locomotive in the display cabinet.



Class 47, D1924, on the rear of a steam excursion led by LNER Thompson Class B1 61306 'Mayflower' leaving Platform 6 at Exeter St David's on 1st June 2024 (Photo: J. Caesar).

20 Years on Okehampton Interchange

David Naylor

While continuing archiving activities in our archive room I came across a couple of presentations made in 2004 regarding the (then) present state of Dartmoor Railway and the vision of future plans for the railway.



Photo of Class 08 08937

At the time, the Dartmoor Railway Sunday Rover was in full swing, with trains to Exeter and links with buses (some heritage) which stopped outside the station linking places such as Tavistock and other parts of Dartmoor. The Dartmoor 'Pony' train also transported passengers up to Meldon station where views of Dartmoor and Meldon Viaduct could be appreciated from the decking area of the Meldon Buffet, also a popular stop for walkers and cyclists along the Granite Way. There were cycle hire facilities on Platform 3 at Okehampton for those without their own bicycles. With regular passenger services still just a distant aim, the tourism aspect was high on the agenda for the Dartmoor Railway. Freight traffic from Meldon Quarry (which was still active) also used the line, transporting ballast up country.

At the time, it was estimated that the contribution to the local economy was in the region of £400,000 with 35,000 passenger journeys & between 20,000 and 30,000 cyclists passing over Meldon Viaduct. The

whole line was seen as an asset for future development both as a public transport and sustainable tourist link.

In April 2004 Meldon visitor centre was upgraded with increased historical displays, and in May, Sampford Courtenay station was reopened for Sunday Summer passenger services. Plans for future developments at this stage were to develop Yeoford as an interchange station linking up to Tarka Line services, a new station with passing loop at North Tawton, and a new station called Okehampton Parkway, provisionally for cyclists and walkers, but also with a view for a viable future commuter service to Exeter for which, at the time, the estimated catchment population was somewhere in the region of 22,000 (and growing).



Funding was secured for a feasibility study for this vision, including a market study into the potential market for a resumption of regular passenger services to Exeter and detailed engineering and planning surveys for Okehampton Parkway and North Tawton stations.

The vision of 20 years ago, as we know, has almost finally come to pass. Regular passenger services recommenced on 21st November 2021 with an hourly service introduced the following May, and with the funding secured, a new station (recently named Okehampton Interchange) is due to be completed sometime late in 2025. Passenger numbers using the service have far exceeded any of the pre-opening forecasts, with the footfall for Okehampton station between November 2021 and November 2022 reaching 258,479.

Further updates on the new station's progress can be found on the following link (on the Dartmoor Line website):

Okehampton Interchange - The Dartmoor Line
<https://dartmoorline.com/okehampton-interchange/>

Magazine Contributions Invited

We invite contributions for the magazine of items likely to be of interest to members – photos, memories, articles, history. Any photo contributions preferably in jpeg format and less than 2MB, and text preferably in Word (.doc/.docx) or Open Office (.odt) format or similar. Please get in touch if you'd like to ask any questions or send in material for consideration: museum@dartmoor-railway-association.org

Online Fundraising

Please consider using easyfundraising every time you shop online!

www.easyfundraising.org.uk/causes/drso

Five go Trainspotting

Andrew Turner

The promise of both steam and diesel specials through Exeter on Saturday 1st June proved too much of an attraction for the five DRA members that caught the 09:25 departure from Okehampton and it proved a pleasant journey on a class 158.



We were off to see the Thompson class B1 61306 ‘Mayflower’ as the steam and the class 52 D1015 ‘Western Champion’ hauling the diesel tour.

Exeter St. David’s was its usual busy summer Saturday as 61306 passed through platform 4 at 10:42 only six minutes late. It was a slow pass as the signal showed red at the end of the platform so all could get a great look at the engine and rake of 12 coaches with class 47 D1924 on the rear. Halfway along the platform the signal changed to orange, the driver giving a whistle as he opened up to pull away from the station.

A lovely sight and sound on a sunny day. Then it was a wait for the diesel tour which passed through at 11:59 in the disguise of D1011 'Western Thunderer' which was similar to when the locomotive visited Okehampton in 2016 as D1010 'Western Campaigner'. Eleven lovely Intercity coaches trailed behind and on the rear was class 50 50034 'Furious' seen at Okehampton leading the last railtour to visit in 2022.



I do wonder if the passengers about to board a modern-day intercity express would prefer the comfort the seats on the charter provide and the addition of a proper buffet coach, how many remember those?

Our 12:37 departure from Exeter was on time and the trainspotting five of Dave Naylor, Dave Ellis, Graham Peacock, Tom Baxter and Andrew Turner arrived back after an enjoyable day. Look out for steam on the mainline it is a fabulous sight!

On the Isle of Man

Sue Baxter




Isle of Man, along the prom. The horse was called Harry and was perfectly aware he had to stand still while the points were changed. Suitable for low speed, eco-friendly rail journeys. Intermediate stop maintenance is one Polo mint!



This isn't Percy! We constantly remind people they are not allowed to vape on the station. I can't imagine now how smokey it would have been then when even a cat was promoting smoking! Seen on Groudle Glen Railway, Isle of Man.

The Bulleid Buffet

Named after Oliver Bulleid, the Southern Railway's innovative engineer, the excellent station cafe is run by Leanne Knight and her team.



Barista Coffee, homemade cakes, quiches, pies, pasties & treats.
All day breakfast, lunch & takeaway. Picnic pick up point for your Granite Way exploration. Open: Summer 7am-5pm, Winter 8am-4pm.
f Tel: 07410 609160 • thebulleidbuffet@gmail.com 
Okehampton Railway Station, Station Road, Okehampton EX20 1EJ

Okehampton Train & Bus Information

With bus connections available from the station, please visit our Service Information web page which can give you pointers towards information to help plan your journeys:



<https://www.dartmoor-railway-association.org/services>

Committee of the Dartmoor Railway Association

Chairman: Sue Baxter

Secretary: Tom Baxter

Treasurer: Christine Horner

Membership Secretary & Volunteer Coordinator:

Geoff Horner

Committee Members:

Ron Kirby, John Caesar, Liz Westlake, Ged Kirby

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