

**DARTMOOR RAILWAY**  
ASSOCIATION

# The Dartmoor Pony

**The Magazine of the  
Dartmoor Railway Association**

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**Reopening on track**

# The Dartmoor Pony

Issue No. 42

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## Dartmoor Railway Association

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

**FRONT COVER:** Colas Class 56 56302 under the footbridge at Okehampton.

**BACK COVER:** Top: Avoiding the drain, making ready to insert shortened sleepers. Bottom: Empty Platform 3 on 1<sup>st</sup> July 2021 cleared by DRA ready for work to begin.

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## **2021 Annual General Meeting**

In view of continuing unease about indoor meetings, it has been decided to conduct the business of the Annual General Meeting via the Pony, as we did in 2020. This magazine constitutes notice of the 2021 AGM, and includes the various annual reports. A separate voting slip is included.

The only voting required is to elect the 2021-2 committee, and we felt that the simplest way to deal with this is to assume acceptance of the candidates unless members indicate otherwise. So you only need to respond on the voting slip if you object to the election of any of the nominees.

If anyone else would like to be considered for committee membership, please let us know by the date stated on the voting slip, and we will issue a revised one.

The elected members will appoint the officers at the first committee meeting after the AGM.

## **Chairman's Report – The Reopening comes Nearer!**

*Sue Baxter*

Last time I wrote of an exhilarating time, and *then* the activity really speeded up! So I hope you enjoy reading and seeing all the activity in this Pony.

The transition of name to simply Dartmoor Railway Association (DRA) and the revision of the Constitution as detailed in the last magazine have gone smoothly. A huge thankyou to Jon Kelsey for this and for the extensive work he has done on the website, which I hope you will enjoy even more now.

We left you last time with the view of an open station again from the Signal Box, without any stock in Platforms 1 or 2. The latest visit to the downside has been by the Tamper unit which was stabled for maintenance and to allow ballast trains in before the tamping of the final part of Phase 4 through the station takes place.



**Tamper moves past Platform 2.**

On 30<sup>th</sup> March we were actually on the footbridge with Engineer Tom Coxon during a works visit when the news of the transfer of the line beneath us from Aggregate Industries (AI) to Network Rail (NR) reached him. An historic moment enjoyed by us all! At the same time the plan was made to thoroughly examine and refurbish the station roof as necessary. This means scaffolding around the whole building. Easy at the front, but not so on the platform. When Devon County Council (DCC) did work in 1997 the canopy glass was entirely missing and so access was clear.



**Tom Coxon (2nd from left) had call from Chris Irwin that the railway line had just been transferred.**

Four diesel “Thumper” unit cars have gone to the Caledonian Railway at Brechin in Scotland. Members spent considerable time and effort on two of them in the past, power car and driving end trailer from 1132. They were the railway’s workhorse up until 2014. So we hope they find a good home north of the border. A former mainline driver once commented how eager commuters could get past his cab to the exit gate so quickly because of the efficient way passengers were

disgorged from the multiple slam doors onto the platform. Our passengers really enjoyed the service. Guards less so as the guard's van was next to the engine and without access to the passenger accommodation. Noisy and lonely if we went all the way to the Coleford Junction boundary! However in summer we could carry bikes and at Christmas we could even sneak in a reindeer!



**Viewing our LMS brakevan in the compressor house headshunt at Meldon.**

Our stock is still in Meldon yard or, in the case of the Southern brake van, in the workshop shed. A meeting is now finally arranged with AI to take matters forward on a method of working up there etc. The plan is still to have our stock at Okehampton station for the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration. It will need all hands to help get our stock presentable after two winters without Carriage & Wagon attention, but with other, unwanted, attention.





The 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the opening of the railway to Okehampton is on 3<sup>rd</sup> October and will be celebrated over the weekend of October Saturday 2<sup>nd</sup> and Sunday 3<sup>rd</sup>. 150 years ago, as a photo in the museum shows, there was a magnificent giant triple arch decorated with greenery across the centre of town. Local schools are involved in making posters, bunting and doing a competition round town. There will also be mugs for the children. There will be an exhibition of photos, background information in the press and an historical booklet. A selection of photos was made recently at a meeting held in the Signal Box. We aim to dress in Victorian costume on Platform 2. (The rest of the station will sadly not be open). We will have bunting, definitely, and a seven and a quarter inch gauge loco called *Okehampton* in steam, hopefully, on our platform.

Storing everything away, but keeping painting, gardening, running the shop and the Buffet is a trial. We have some stuff in both Signal Box and station basements, the latter no longer easily accessible as it is behind security Heras fencing and part of contractors Griffiths works compound. However we did get more rubbish and a defunct large chest freezer out of it to make room. Yes, it did come out of the hatch you can see in the photo! Our little metal shed is in the way of a planned emergency fire exit ramp from Platform 3 beside the paraffin shed. We await detailed ground plans before we decide where to try to move it!





**Descending to the station basement.**



**Surveying can be fun!**



**Just getting ready to start...**



**No upside track.**





**New Track Construction machine straddle carrier under footbridge.**



**Lifting continuous welded rail off formation ahead of the track laying machine.**



**Mound of old ballast in the car park.**



**56302 'Peco' with a train of concrete sleepers.**





**NTCM pauses for maintenance before proceeding under Sampford Courtenay Bridge.**



**Sorting 11 miles of old track for recycling at Westbury.**

The track renewal in May was a privilege to see from the grandstand of Platform 2 and the Footbridge. The loading of the works train with the concrete sleepers by crane was slow when it was windy and then it became too dangerous to operate on Saturday 8<sup>th</sup>. Road-railers were used then. Once loaded, the sleeper wagons were pulled back by a Colas Class 56 engine to the west of the station, with the New Track Construction (NTC) machine at the Meldon end. There was a last chance to survey the line again by laser (to programme the on board NTC computer?)

The continuous welded rails, were then lifted out of the upside 4 foot to either side of the track. The old track was cut (or rather twisted until each rail broke!) into 15 foot sections and removed as whole panels. In the station these generally held together but some down the line fell apart as rotten sleepers or fixings gave way. The old ballast was scraped away and along with the panels was temporarily stored in the car park.

Monday 10<sup>th</sup> May saw the track bed whacker packed ready for the NTC Machine to pull itself forward on its caterpillar tracks, the operator guided by a central yellow painted line. Our water supply was briefly and unintentionally interrupted, but fixed within the hour. About 15 new sleepers were laid and temporarily fishplated onto the track beneath the train. The new continuous welded rail straddling the formation.

Our role was in being on hand with local information such as the location of the water stopcock. Also being included in discussions on changes which may be needed around the station such as the aforementioned fire escape.

11<sup>th</sup> May was good. The track laying went ahead in perfect weather, and we were able to appreciate the final phase of the 11 miles of track renewal, along with local dignitaries and the press. It had been laid in 20 days, a very pleasing record for NR. The track is the industry's highest quality, with little planned maintenance for 25 years. New blue standard drain covers now protect all the drains in between the tracks.

A final ballast drop has been made before tamping to ensure the formation drains well between the platform walls. Our heavy rainfall has been noted!

Meetings both formal and informal, have been numerous and useful. Andy Savage, a Director of the Railway Heritage Trust which administers funds on behalf of NR, has visited and indicated that there should be funding available for refurbishing the parquet floor through the building, and the Booking Hall door mechanism. Car park design is not yet finalised. There will be provision for buses, taxis, disabled and cycle parking. Ongoing rail maintenance means that there has to be a designated access point for HGV's to the line somewhere. The NR teams certainly know they have to keep on top of our temperate forest jungle. They have been abseiling down some of the embankments in order to de-vegetate them.

Great Western Railway (GWR) community funding will come to us for station gardening and we are being encouraged to put in a special bid to prepare the station for the official opening. This is a little challenging as the date will be in either autumn or winter. We intend continuing to use large wooden barrels. Heavy, stable, and rounded they are good for plants and passing customers alike. Meanwhile the 2 long green wooden platform benches are inside the main building, but away from current planned works.

On 29<sup>th</sup> May volunteers opened up Platform 2 to visitors, including the Museum, offering light refreshments and the railway bookshop. With Covid ongoing we are pleased that we have outdoor space, with 2 parasols for sunny weather, and at least 10 seats under the canopy for when it is raining. We generally have a steady trickle of customers and plenty of time to chat about developments, spread the word about the coming service, gain friends, members and future volunteers? Our Platform 2 service will be offered for some time to come as the main station building is not expected to open now until several months into 2022. The Bulleid Buffet will be run by the Youth Hostel, which will also be responsible for the toilets, opening up the Booking Hall, Dartmoor National Park Information Centre and Waiting Room.





**Visitors to Platform 2 discuss the progress.**



**Lunchtime trainspotting!**

Television coverage has continued, on Spotlight South West and on National news, reaching members in Scotland. An upcoming programme in the series on Britain's Scenic Railways will feature filming from 8<sup>th</sup> June when volunteers were on the station.

The retaining wall beneath the Signal Box and under Platform 3 above the drive now has a new brick top edging and has been de-vegetated. So far most of the bushes we planted have survived the ropes used by the abseiling workmen. The wall was a potential hazard we pointed out and are very glad to see tackled.

The unsightly vandalised blue car was finally able to be legally removed on 23<sup>rd</sup> June, thanks to persistence by West Devon officials. So it was fitting that a few days later we hosted a fine display of vintage Ford cars. Their owners were very happy to be on their first meet up since Covid. Some are supporters of TORS - Tavistock to Okehampton Reopening Scheme, with which we have links.



**Retaining wall gets new brickwork top.**



**Blue car finally gone!**



**A fine Ford line up on the downside.**

1<sup>st</sup> July, was Key Handover Day. A celebration for the little gathering, over tea and biscuits, of their commitment (and that of many others) to the reopening of services, from 18 months, to 49 years (Tom Baxter). The Okehampton to Meldon Staff was handed over by Phil Coupland



on behalf of Aggregate Industries to Christian Irwin for Network Rail. This signified the sale and transfer of all the railway from Coleford Junction to Meldon including Meldon Viaduct station and the down line which forms a run round loop within the Quarry, as well as Sampford Courtenay station and the land within the railway boundary.



**Phil Coupland hands ON-MN staff to Christian Irwin (AI to NR)**

For Devon County Council, Andrea Davies handed over to Christian the keys for the station buildings on Platform 3. I had been privileged to hold these since September 16<sup>th</sup> 2020. During nine and a half months volunteers opened up for various industry visits, kept a check on toilets, swept the station, tended the plants and made it welcoming for various groups, including the Department for Transport (DfT) on 3<sup>rd</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> June. To make the sale legal a £1 coin was handed by Christian to Andrea. In 1994 the payment was the same when DCC bought the whole station from British Rail. DCC also handed over the track into the former Bude Bay beside Platform 1 to NR.



**Department for Transport officials on Platform 2.**



**£1 coin, Platform 3 building keys and ON to MN staff, held by Christian Irwin, Andrea Davies and Phil Coupland while Matt Barnes supervises!**

## **DRA's ongoing position:**

- Has a lease for rooms on Platform 2 from Devon County Council, which continues to own Platforms 1 and 2 and the Footbridge. Painting and general maintenance continue.
- Should soon be engaging with GWR for a Community lease on Platform 3 to cover the Ticket Office, Booking Hall, Information Centre, Shop (+ basement) and Waiting Room heritage area, and Signal Box (+ basement).
- Should have a cleaning contract from GWR to do what we have always done! ... keep the area free of litter, empty rubbish bins as required and keep generally tidy. Payment will go direct to the Association.
- Should have a Station Adoption agreement with GWR for maintaining planters on Platform 3, and receive an annual sum towards our work there. Continuing Platform 2 gardening.
- Is engaging with AI to have an independent agreement covering our stock in the yard, use of the shed, movements and traction.
- Maintaining and developing the Arthur Westlake Museum.
- Will be refurbishing the FK and Lab 11 carriages and LMS brake van for display on Platform 1.
- Welcoming the Public to Platform 2 at least every Saturday, Sunday and Bank Holiday.
- Preparing for a Victorian style 150<sup>th</sup> celebration of the first opening of a train service to Okehampton on Sunday 3<sup>rd</sup> October.

## **Historical Footnote:**

Tom lent Christian the £1 coin to buy their part of the station from Andrea (everyone else only had plastic)! She later gave the coin back to Tom. So did Tom, for a while at least, own that side of the station?

## **Financial Statements for the year ended 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021**

*Christine Horner*

Note that the details printed below represent the accounts prior to auditing.

<b>RECEIPTS AND PAYMENTS ACCOUNT</b>					
	Unrestricted Funds	Designated Funds	Restricted Funds	Total for 2020/2021	Total for 2019/2020
<b>RECEIPTS</b>					
Membership	2947.00			2947.00	2706
Donations	1203.48			1203.48	2564
Brake Van Donations	0.00			0.00	380
Shop Sales	156.00			156.00	2505
Bank Interest	0.43			0.43	1
Museum Donations	0.00			0.00	34
HRA Railcards	50.00			50.00	140
Peter Flick Memorial Fund	0.00			0.00	0
	<b>4356.91</b>	<b>0.00</b>		<b>4356.91</b>	<b>8330</b>
<b>PAYMENTS</b>					
Stationery, postage & general printing	339.33			339.33	494
Pony Magazine printing	425.00			425.00	917
Carriage, Wagon and Station refurbishment cos	801.68			801.68	952
Shop Stock	23.59			23.59	217
Audit Fee	120.00			120.00	0
Miscellaneous Expenses	1639.45			1639.45	2497
Museum	0.00			0.00	30
HRA Railcards	50.00			50.00	140
HRA Membership	56.26			56.26	66
Mr Pawley Donation Use	0.00			0.00	315
Peter Flick Memorial Fund useage	0.00			0.00	257
	<b>3455.31</b>	<b>0.00</b>	<b>0.00</b>	<b>3455.31</b>	<b>5885</b>
<b>Excess of receipts over payments</b>	<b>901.60</b>	<b>0.00</b>	<b>0.00</b>	<b>901.60</b>	<b>2445</b>
Bank and cash Balances at 1st April 2020	22656.51	700.00		23356.51	20912
Bank and cash Balances at 31st March 2021	24258.11	0.00	0.00	24258.11	23357



DARTMOOR RAILWAY SUPPORTERS ASSOCIATION				
Financial Statements for the year ended 31st March 2021				
STATEMENT OF ASSETS AND LIABILITIES				
Bank and cash balances			24258	23357
Assets retained for Association's use:				
SR Brake Van			2000.00	
FK Coach			9000.00	
LAB11 Coach			17500.00	
LMS Brake Van			10000.00	
		<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>38500.00</b>	
The Shop income and expenditure has been recorded on a cash basis, however at the year end there was shop stock with a value of £800 at cost				

## **Annual Volunteer Coordinator's Report**

*Geoff Horner*

As reported elsewhere the Station Maintenance team have worked continuously throughout the period of lockdown and other restrictions keeping Okehampton station in a condition that has drawn well deserved praise from Network Rail and GWR as they work towards the reintroduction of the regular Exeter service. For the Carriage and Wagon group it has been a start/stop year as we have been unable to access the shed and yard at Meldon since November 2020. However there is now a light at the end of the tunnel with discussions over the terms of an access agreement between DRA and Aggregate Industries now underway. We are hopeful that these will soon lead to the resumption of tackling the backlog of repair and maintenance that our rolling stock needs.

# **Annual Membership Secretary's Report**

*Geoff Horner*

Membership has remained constant over the past year and at 196 members is just one up on the total at the end of last December. We are pleased to welcome as new members Trevor Coleman of Exeter, Anthony and Tracey Purnell of Lydford and Ian Saunders and Sandra Wood of Beaworthy.

## **Association Secretary**

Having served on the committee since June 2013 and as secretary since mid 2014, Jon Kelsey has decided that the time has come to relinquish his role of secretary. He is therefore standing down from this role and as a committee member. Jon has handled the role with much skill and diplomacy and his help and guidance will be missed by the committee. Thank you Jon for the time and effort you have given the association. There is now a role to be filled. If there is any member who has the time, enthusiasm and ideally secretarial skills who would like to put his name forward for election to the committee we will be pleased to hear from you. Details of how and by when to submit your name are set out elsewhere in this issue.

## **Distribution of Timetable & Publicity Leaflets**

We are looking for some volunteer members who may be able, in due course, to distribute Great Western and Devon & Cornwall Rail Partnership timetable and publicity leaflets to places local to them, such as rural pubs, shops, surviving post offices, village halls, notice boards and Parish magazines etc., to encourage use of the new Okehampton to Exeter train service.

Please contact DRA Committee member Tony Hill at [tonyjhill@gmail.com](mailto:tonyjhill@gmail.com) if you are able to help.

## **Rosie's Diary – The Power of Mice and Bats and Bears**

*by Rosie*

Our Polar Bear once had a mate down the line. She nearly made a road-railer driver jump out of his skin when she confronted him as he came round a curve. Very sadly, her whereabouts is now unknown. We just hope she has somewhere cool to relax during this heat.



Our Polar Bear stayed in the cool of the Booking Hall this past year and charmed the children who looked through the closed doors at him. Then he found a baby bear to look after and carry on his back, until he too mysteriously disappeared.

I felt sorry for Polar. I do not like swimming but I know some bears do, and I thought it would make him feel clean and cooler. So I was delighted when I found out that he was going to Seaton Tramway by the sea. However I did not have time to explain this to him before his new friend Nick Nicholls tried to shuffle him through the Ladies Gate. So he nearly refused to go. There was no way Nick could have got him to move! However, his old friends Ron and Geoff coaxed him and he decided to take the chance of a new life. The gang and I intend to visit him this autumn and check out his new home.



My hearing is not so good now, so I do miss a few things. But I think everyone was deaf to the fact that there may be bats flying around under the canopy on Platform 3 at dusk. But a batman with a bat detector to hear calls at perhaps just 45 khz and tweezers to pick up

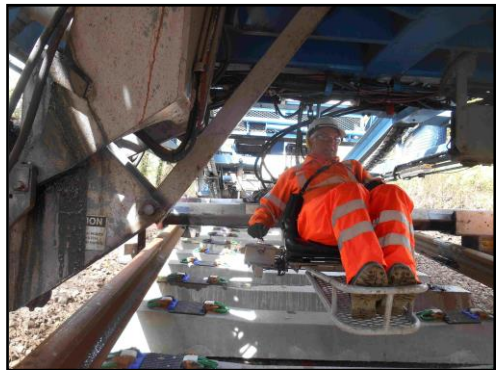
tiny, crumbly mouse like droppings, knows differently. Now if they really are around then the new work on lighting and passenger displays can only go ahead when Network Rail get a licence, which should not be long now. That is some power if it is a pipistrelle bat which only weighs in at one third of an ounce or 9 grams!



Nowadays, when there is a mouse sneaking in and out of the grit boxes or hiding amongst the ballast I am inclined to play cool, snooze and just watch it through slit eyes. However, in a recent Channel 4 film shoot I was miffed when the attention was not on me but on a cocky little mouse which came out of the Okehampton sack

on the red Post Office barrow. It literally washed itself and hung around while the camera rolled for 5 minutes and a mobile phone was held just a hand's breadth away.

That was just one mouse, but just imagine how crowded the track side must be when you see that number 144 is written on the side of a dormouse box in a lineside bush at Sampford Courtenay! Tom was bound to have seen some on his track monitoring screen when he sat under the (stationary) New Track Construction machine.



But when he saw them I bet he kept quiet, because they have the power to bend the strongest engineer over backwards. They might even make a project manager weep when they decide to take up residence under a port-a-loo on Greenslade Bridge, or under a recent stack of old track panels, which needs to be removed before the signalling cable can be put down!

## **Committee of the Dartmoor Railway Association**

**Chairman:** Sue Baxter

**Vice-Chairman:** Paul Vodden

**Secretary:** Jon Kelsey

**Treasurer:** Christine Horner

**Membership Secretary & Volunteer Coordinator:**

Geoff Horner

**Committee Members:**

Tom Baxter, Dave Clegg, John Coxon, Tony Hill, Ron Kirby

## **Dartmoor Railway Association Contacts**

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**Facebook:** [www.facebook.com/dartmoorrailwayassociation](http://www.facebook.com/dartmoorrailwayassociation)

**Twitter:** [www.twitter.com/DartmoorRail](http://www.twitter.com/DartmoorRail)



