

DARTMOOR RAILWAY
ASSOCIATION

The Dartmoor Pony

**The Magazine of the
Dartmoor Railway Association**

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Booking Office Restored

The Dartmoor Pony

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

FRONT COVER: Sunday 12/3/23 found Class 158 158769 deputising for the usual Class 150 on the 1225 Okehampton to Exeter Central. *Photo:* © Tony Hill.

BACK COVER: Top: 'Through the Waiting Room window' - Welcoming Flowers as often provided in the past at stations, the 1930's 'Art Deco' furniture, the 1025 train to Exeter Central, a deserted Downside platform bench and in the far distance the former Goods Shed, now a Youth Hostel. *Photo:* © Tony Hill. Bottom: A view of the new Southern style leaflet rack in the restored booking hall. *Photo:* © John Caesar

CONTENTS

| | |
|--|---------|
| Chairman's Report | Page 4 |
| Notice of Annual General Meeting | Page 8 |
| Membership & Volunteer Matters | Page 9 |
| DRA Members' Socials | Page 10 |
| DRA Shop | Page 11 |
| Okehampton Station Booking Office display | Page 12 |
| Trolley Departures | Page 15 |
| Station Signs | Page 16 |
| Railway accident at North Tawton, LSWR, 1875 | Page 17 |
| Station Facilities | Page 22 |

Chairman's Report

Sue Baxter

258,479 passenger journeys in the first year was good reason for celebration on 28th November 2022 when youthful Rail Minister Huw Merriman was very pleased to make an official first anniversary visit to unveil a plaque for the reopening of the whole station building. He quipped that he hoped he would still be in post on his first anniversary as Rail Minister (as there had recently been a rapid turnover!).



He was accompanied by experienced railway men Mark Hopwood (Managing Director of Great Western Railway (GWR)), Stuart Calvert (Capital Delivery Director for Network Rail (NR)), and Ian Mundy (then New Infrastructure Delivery and Readiness Manager, now Senior Portfolio Manager for GWR overseeing Marsh Barton Station and hopefully soon Okehampton Parkway). It was great news when the Department for Transport (DfT) announced that the £13.4 million had been allocated so the Okehampton Parkway project can go ahead. The Dartmoor Railway Association (DRA) will continue to be treated as stakeholders for this new station.

On reflection we were present that day at the fourth opening of the station building at Okehampton. A modest building in 1872, a more substantial rebuild in the 1930's, a Devon County Council led refurbishment in 1997, and a re-slatted, re-wired and IT connected station with 1950's ambience in 2022!



ICE Awards - Emma Lewis, Sue Baxter and Rob Breckon

A little earlier, on 22nd November, the Dartmoor Line project was nominated for the Institute of Civil Engineers (ICE) 2022 awards for South West England. The event had been postponed due to Queen Elizabeth's funeral. The other nominated projects included flood defence and alleviation schemes at Calstock, Clyst St Mary and Sidmouth: Oceans Canal Bridge near Stroud; a fish pass at Buckfast Abbey; M5 J11 Golden Valley N&S Bridges; and Severn Ham water mains Replacement across a Site of Special Scientific Interest. Held in the Delta Hotels/Marriot in Bristol City Centre, the event had the feel of being the Oscars of the engineering world. At our table I was flanked by Rob Breckon, NR Senior Communications Manager who held many interviews on Okehampton Station that reached across the world, and Emma Lewis who was the engineer coordinating the placement of engineers with appropriate expertise to the Dartmoor Line project. Emma had moved on to the delivery of the Dawlish and Teignmouth works. There was

The Dartmoor Pony Spring 2023



also Dan Parkes who as NR Senior Programme Manager delivered the project from Construction Headquarters on what will be the car park for Okehampton Parkway. Rob Bell was the presenter of short three minute films of each project before we had the smoke and suspense. Some awards were taken by 15 representatives, but we were just four taking the stage to receive two sparkling engraved glass trophies!

The first was the Community Award for linking so many settlements back into the network. The second was the Showcase Award, the industry's highest accolade. So do look out for the trophy cabinet in the Information Centre which now displays nine awards gained by the Dartmoor Line.

The Booking Hall, Waiting Room and Ticket Office, all heritage areas, were opened in a convivial fashion, as the ribbon cutting was followed by tea and cake in the Bulleid Buffet, on 21st December 2022. This was a great achievement by Richard Burningham, Manager of Devon and Cornwall Rail Partnership who had the vision and knowledge from his days working in ticket offices.

These events and others have kept us well and truly in the spotlight so it has been great to hear constant compliments for the station which reflects so well on the work of our volunteers, supported by our members. So what else has been going on?

We thank Kathryn Friend Powell whose garage has now been emptied of all the station furniture she kindly let us store there. Office cupboard, desk, drawers, chairs, tables, bookcase, clock and more kept safely in the dry. Our rooms on the first floor above the station are now coming into use. We can sort and store archive materials, and hold committee meetings there both for DRA and for the OkeRail Executive. With space now created in the second museum room, two glass cabinets which we have not been able to use before are being moved around and we can now take loan of the reopening display created by Kristy Turner at the Museum of Dartmoor Life.

At Meldon we are about to have a site visit by a NR representative, in particular looking at the station. We continue to board up our stock outside against weather and unwelcome visitors. There is some progress towards a formal lease with Aggregate Industries, and the Carriage & Wagon Shed is still in place.

Back at Okehampton Station the best event, for the shop team in particular, has been the installation of the electric heating. This includes a heating and aircon unit which blows hot air down from above the counter. There is also useful extra space on some walls where the radiators supplied by the gas system used to be. It is sad that the carefully sourced new heritage-style replica radiator in the Waiting Room is now redundant, but it still adds ambience.

Along the line itself the Two Moors Way long distance footpath crossing was finally opened by 9th January this year., the last level crossing to be fixed. Lack of power to the site and the need to activate on site equipment was the cause of the delay. In February a planned engineering week saw the last bit of jointed track removed between Coleford Junction and Crediton, which means the line speed has gone up. Also work was done on Yeoford overbridge, and drainage improvements.

The Station Tripartite lease continues to be a testing experience, meaning brushing up on some mediaeval English. In the meantime a water butt has been installed and the passenger information system tweaked so it appears more reliable, which also improves life for volunteers around the station! The fare has increased for the first time from £8 to £8.40 return to Exeter. We are also now under the new £100 Penalty fine for anyone travelling from the station without a ticket. The ticket machine is currently more reliable and the guards are also selling tickets.

Timetables for the Dartmoor Line and local buses, along with information about Okehampton and Dartmoor National Park continue to fly out. It continues to be lovely to find how it has transformed the lives of teenagers with easy reliable access elsewhere. Also for older folk

who have finally taken the plunge and let the train and bus take the strain! We still meet many who have not taken a train in decades and who need a bit of a confidence boost about managing car parking, ticket machine and actually naming the correct station in Exeter. Our volunteers always help when they can.



Now looking forward to an increasingly busy time as Easter approaches and it is the first season with all facilities running. We hope as many of you as possible can come and enjoy the train service and the station this Spring!

Notice of Annual General Meeting - 24th May 2023

All members are warmly invited to our AGM which is taking place at the Ockment Centre, Okehampton, on Wednesday 24th May between 6.30 and 8.30pm.

The Meeting will be followed by a talk from our speaker Richard Westlake. Richard is highly respected for his knowledge of our line and extensive railway career which started at Okehampton. Along with Arthur, his father, he has played a key role in achieving the reinstatement of our service.

Light Refreshments will be available between the meeting and the talk.

The timing allows members to arrive and depart by train.

Membership & Volunteer Matters

Geoff Horner, Membership Secretary/Volunteer Coordinator

It is encouraging to be able to report a steady inflow of membership renewals for 2023 giving us a total of 150 members at the time of writing. Thank you to all who have done so. To those who have yet to renew please do not hesitate to do so. Your continued support is vital to us.

We are pleased to welcome new member John Clark of Hatherleigh but sadly have received news of the passing of two members, Sue Clegg and Robin Townshend. We extend our sympathy to their families.

Volunteer activity continues around the station where the Station Maintenance and Gardening teams remain busy each Wednesday and Saturday. Redecoration of the second museum room on platform 2 is progressing well and it is expected that the re-establishment of the museum displays will soon get under way. On platform 3 the former flat on the first floor of the main building has been redecorated and is now in use as a storage/meeting/'break out' area. As always there are numerous items of general maintenance to be attended to along with the regular litter picking patrols. With the onset of spring the flower tubs are now coming back to life and the shop has been open on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays throughout the winter – a first for the team of shop volunteers.

There has been no change in the situation at Meldon and the Carriage & Wagon group, apart from essential care and repair visits to our rolling stock, remains in limbo. Members may have seen a recent article in the railway press and on social media speculating that the former Dartmoor Railway carriage & wagon shed was to be dismantled and taken away from Meldon. We have asked Aggregate Industries for clarification on this and they have assured us that this is not the case and they are continuing with the intention of bringing forward the licence agreement for us to operate at the Meldon quarry site.

DRA Members' Socials

Dates for the upcoming 2023 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!

- March 1st
- April 5th
- May 3rd
- June 7th
- July 5th
- August 2nd
- September 6th
- October 4th
- November 1st
- December 6th



The three buses lined up shortly before departure are the 1025 to Launceston, 1030 to Exeter via Whiddon Down & Tedburn and 1025 to Bude, with a total of about 15 passengers between them (photo: Tony Hill).

DRA Shop

Christine Horner

Our new larger shop on platform 3 at Okehampton has reported a steady flow of customers and has been open throughout the winter months thanks to the team of Andrew, Chris, Liz, and Maureen. The range of items for sale has gradually been expanded beyond just second hand railway books. Several new railway book titles are now available (see the website for details). Also available are a range of locally hand crafted jewellery, glassware gifts and candles as well cards by local artists and railway scene cards, ideal for that 'out of the usual' gift. If you are in or visiting Okehampton do call in and see what we have to offer. At present the shop is open from 10.30 to 16.00 on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays. A selection of new railway books and other items for sale on line are available on the website. Orders can be made by telephoning Christine Horner on 01363 82383 or by email to christine.horner@talk21.com

If you have any railway books that you no longer want these would be very welcome but we regret that we can no longer accept any further railway magazines.

And finally, if you are doing any on line shopping please check if the retailer you are shopping with is available via the **Easy Fundraising** website at www.easyfundraising.org.uk

Here you will be able to select *Dartmoor Railway Supporters Association** from the list of causes to support, and whatever donation the retailer you are using is offering will go to the DRA at no cost to yourself.

*[*Don't worry about the old name of DRSA, the donation will still come to DRA!]*

Okehampton Station Booking Office display

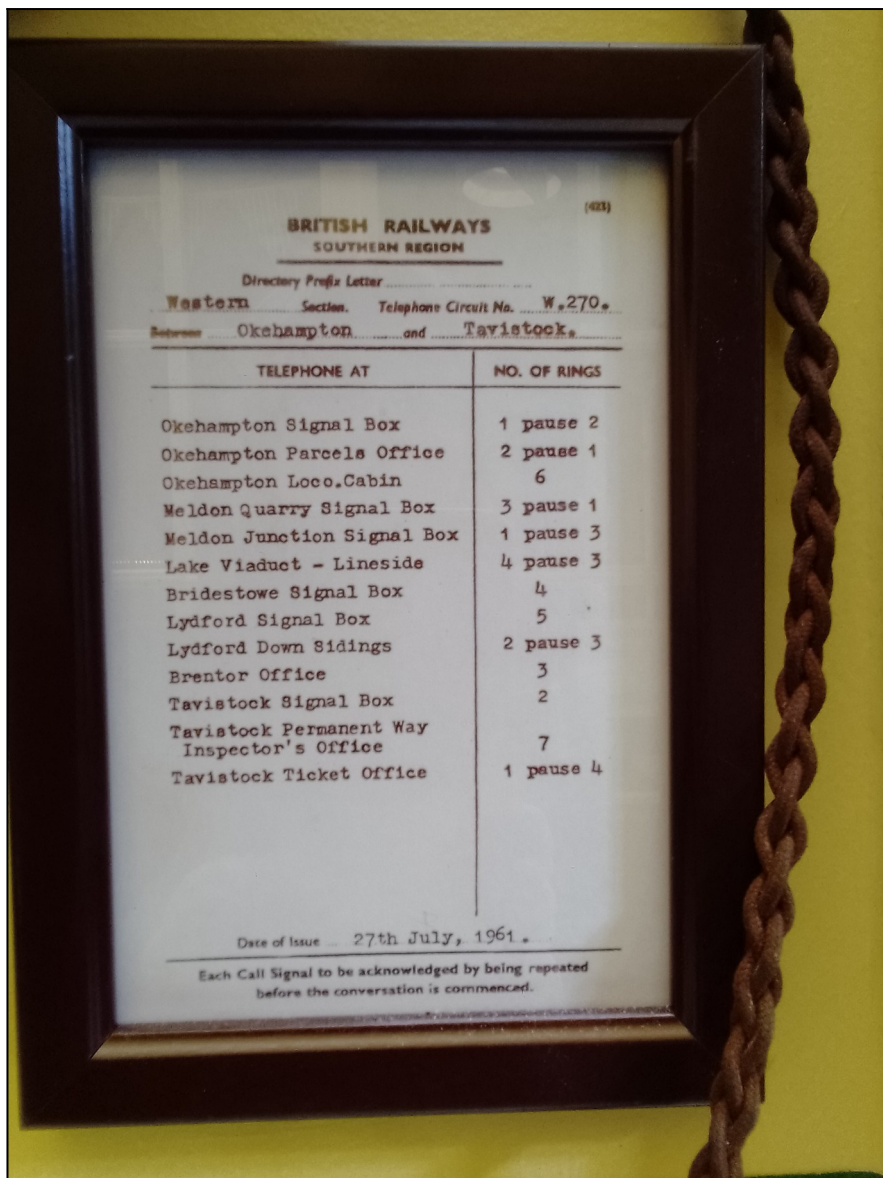


Former BR SR and WR Exeter Area railway staff, from left Tony Hill, Graham Robinson, Richard Westlake, Mrs Ruth Letten, Roy Letten, prior to the official opening of the Okehampton station Booking Office heritage display on 21st December 2022 by Richard Westlake (photo: Tony Hill). Most of the now historical items in the Booking Office were kindly provided by former rail staff Graham Robinson, Colin Burges (who was unable to be present), Richard Burningham and Tony Hill.

Roy Letten (now in his 90s) interestingly was ‘marooned’ in Okehampton Booking Office one night after duty there, due the Great Blizzard of 1962/63. Roy from East Devon, whose home station was then Exmouth, was a Relief member of Southern Region staff expected to work as ordered at any Booking, Parcels or Goods Office anywhere on the main line between Salisbury and Devonport and on Branches to Ilfracombe, Bude and Padstow; how’s that for flexibility and productivity!



Inside the wonderfully restored booking office.



Telephone call signals, date of issue 27th July 1961

Trolley Departures

On Wednesday January 25th 2023, Wickham 10842 and the Robel trolley were removed from Meldon by lorry. They have been acquired by the Rail Trolley Trust, and were taken to the Tanat Valley Light Railway near Oswestry in Shropshire. It's good to know that they are in good hands; some DRA volunteers once briefly harboured ideas of restoring the Wickham.



Wickham 10842 as most of us remember it, piled high with Polar Express detritus.
Date taken: 09/10/2017

Robel permanent way trolley at Meldon, when it was Dartmoor Railway's backup traction.

*Photographer: Geoff Horner.
Date taken: 01/06/2017*



Station signs

Colin Burges of the Exeter and Teign Valley Railway (<https://www.teignrail.co.uk/>) has generously commissioned a set of new station signs, and would like them to go to the groups campaigning for local lines to be reopened, whose members may like to use the signs for publicity.



Photographer: Colin Burges

Made by Rydon Signs, Exeter, the firm which had the British Rail contract and which still supplies much of the national network, these signs are four-fifths of the normal size and use the original 'double arrow' logo, Rail Red and Rail Alphabet.

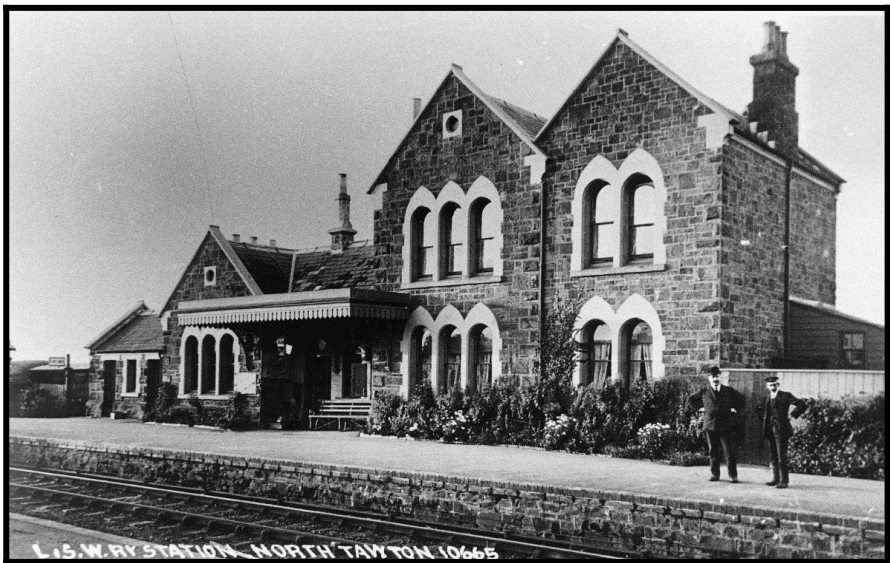
Richard Searight, chairman of the Peninsula Rail Group, has already 'booked' the *Tavistock* sign for the Carnival and EcoFest events in Okehampton in July. *Bideford* is naturally going to Tim Steer of ACE Rail, and Colin hopes that *Bude* will go to Connect Bude.

Now the signage is done, all the groups have to do is rebuild the railways!

Railway accident at North Tawton, London & South Western Railway (LSWR), 30th March 1875

Geoff Horner

A topic that often appears in railway magazines devoted to the history of railways is that of railway accidents that occurred in the 19th century, focusing on a particular line or area of the country. This set me to wonder how the Dartmoor line fared in those days and to carry out some armchair research. The result was that I discovered newspaper reports of several incidents but only one accident at North Tawton on the evening of 30th March 1875 after which a formal investigation was undertaken and a report submitted by Lieut. Col. C.S. Hutchinson RE for the Railway Department, Board of Trade.



An early Edwardian photo of North Tawton

(David Howe Collection, courtesy of Nicholas & Reeve, Irwell Press)

The report gives an interesting insight in to the way the railway operated in those days.

In order to understand better the events that took place that evening a description of the topography in the vicinity of North Tawton station of

what was then known as the Devon and Cornwall branch of the LSWR as set out in the report may help.

“North Tawton station is situated on a gradient of 1 in 264 falling towards Lidford (sic); this gradient changes at the at the Lidford end of the station to 1 in 80 (still falling towards Lidford which continues for about a quarter of a mile; there is then a viaduct about 200 yards long over which the line is level; and from the Lidford end of the viaduct a gradient of 1 in 77 ascending towards Lidford commences and continues for some distance onwards.”

The train involved in the accident was the 7.18pm departure from Yeoford junction to Lidford (*sic*) conveying 1st, 2nd and 3rd class passengers and headed by a LSWR tank engine running tank first, then a LBSCR horse box, LSWR brake van (without guard), three LSWR carriages and a LSWR brake van (with guard on board), a total of six vehicles behind the locomotive. The train left Yeoford 18 minutes late at 7.36pm stopping first at Bow at 7.46pm (17 minutes late and then at North Tawton from which it departed at 7.53pm (16 minutes late). The train crew were the driver George Kimmins (eight months service as driver), the unnamed fireman and the guard William Cox (six years service, 12 months on the Lidford (*sic*) branch).

Driver Kimmins evidence was that after leaving North Tawton he was proceeding at about 30mph up the 1 in 77 gradient and had reached a point some 600 yards from the foot of it when his engine started forward and he realised that he had lost his train. He allowed his engine to run on for some distance for fear that the train would overtake him. He then stopped and giving the fireman a hand lamp sent him back on foot towards North Tawton following on the engine at a distance of 60 or 70 yards and getting as far as the viaduct without seeing anything of the train. Having stopped his locomotive he then instructed the fireman to get back on to the engine buffer beam assuming that the guard must have succeeded in stopping the train. Whistling continuously and moving forward towards the station he then saw the horse box advancing towards him. The engine was immediately put into reverse gear and steam applied but to no avail as the train collided with the

engine. Driver Kimmins continued some distance westwards until he saw that the train had stopped on which he reversed direction to rejoin the train. The train was re-coupled to the engine and after a delay of 10 minutes was able to proceed on its journey. (Inconceivable by today's health & safety standards.) All this was substantiated by the fireman who had remained on the buffer beam at the moment of collision and fortunately suffered no injury. Three passengers on the train were reported as having suffered bruising.

Guard William Cox, riding in his van at the rear of the train testified that after leaving North Tawton the train appeared to be proceeding normally for some distance until it slowed, stopped and then ran back. Looking both ways he could see nothing of the engine. After running back for some distance the train again stopped and then again began to run forward. Unable to understand what was happening he decided that the driver, having failed to get up the 1 in 77 gradient, had set back in order to get a run at it and it was only just before the collision occurred that he realised what must have taken place and applied his brake. He concluded by saying that he had not heard any whistling because had he done so he would have applied his brake sooner.

The cause of the accident was clearly established as the failure of the coupling between the LSWR engine and the LBSCR horse box. The porter at Yeoford who coupled the horse box to the engine stated that he noticed nothing peculiar about the shackle although it was too narrow for the engine hook and that the side chains could not be used without bringing all the drag on them.


The conclusion of the report was that the cause of the collision was the failure of a shackle by which the engine was coupled to the horse box. The shackle was too narrow for the hook of the engine and in the course of the journey it had opened out. As there were no washers on the ends of the connecting bar the shackle had left the bar. Had the engine carried (as it should have done) two couplings, or had the single one been a better fit, then probably no dividing and no consequent collision would have occurred. Also had the guard, who could not have been asleep as he had been out of his van a few moments before at the station, at once

comprehended what was taking place when he found his train moving first backwards and then forwards he could have stopped it with his brake. That he didn't was the result of him being puzzled and at a loss how to act. In the end the report apportioned no blame on any of the railway employees and made just one recommendation, that the provision of lamps on the rear of the locomotive and the facing end of the horse box could have averted the collision.

Acknowledgement: Railways Archive, www.railwaysarchive.co.uk



THE BULLEID BUFFET

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

Station Facilities

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>

Car Parking

Parking at Okehampton station costs £2 per day. For dropping off and picking up, 20 minutes is free. Numberplate recognition is used. The car park is managed by APCOA. Further details at: <https://dartmoorline.com/2022/04/car-park-charges-at-okehampton-start-from-1-may/>

The Bulleid Buffet



Named after Oliver Bulleid, the Southern Railway's innovative engineer, the station cafe is run by Leanne Knight and her team from *The Amazing Brownie Bakers* of Lifton.

The buffet can be contacted on 07410 609160 or thebulleidbuffet@gmail.com



*Have you spotted this poster on the footbridge?
Don't worry, dog tickets are no longer required!*

Committee of the Dartmoor Railway Association

Chairman: Sue Baxter

Vice-Chairman: Paul Vodden

Secretary: Tom Baxter

Treasurer: Christine Horner

Membership Secretary & Volunteer Coordinator:

Geoff Horner

Committee Members:

Ron Kirby, John Caesar

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