

DARTMOOR RAILWAY
ASSOCIATION

The Dartmoor Pony

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Dartmoor Railway Association**

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Community Rail Teamwork

The Dartmoor Pony

Issue No. 46

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

FRONT COVER: Community Rail day volunteers at Meldon Viaduct station on July 5th 2023.

BACK COVER: Top: Some ten years ago this barrow was first received as a metal skeleton and then fleshed out with wood by Simon Jeffery. Recently Graham Peacock has given it a facelift and managed to conserve its solid rubber tyres. Bottom: Signal Box windows get fixed by Graham and Ron on 7th June 2023.

CONTENTS

Chairman's Report	Page 4
Community Rail Teamwork at Meldon Viaduct Station	Page 8
Award for DRA Website	Page 10
Around the Station	Page 13
Coronation Garden Party	Page 15
World Cup of Stations	Page 16
New Summer Sunday Gunnislake Dartmoor bus service	Page 16
Marsh Barton station opening	Page 17
DRA Members' Socials	Page 17
DRA Shop	Page 18
HSTs in preservation	Page 19
Miah is Miffed!	Page 21
Station Information	Page 22

Chairman's Report - for the 2023 AGM held on Wednesday 24th May

Sue Baxter

A welcome to everybody including several who have availed themselves of our train service to get here. We have got our AGM back on track holding it in May this year, free of the delays still caused last year by Covid.

Last year our shop was not open in its new home on Platform 3. Now it displays new and pre-loved railway books, memorabilia and cards, alongside quality local crafts, fiction and children's books. The range of stock keeps increasing!

We have four regular shopkeepers opening the shop on Friday, Saturday and Sunday, as well as the two Museum rooms. We would welcome more members to join the team and help us open the shop more.

Linked by double doors to the shop is the Dartmoor National Park and Information Centre, occupying in part the former WH Smith store still complete with roller shutters to sales hatches into the Booking Hall and out onto Platform 3. We keep it stocked with GWR railway leaflets, Okehampton guides, and then limited local leaflets as well as county wide railway attractions.

As our station has no railway staff, shop staff are invaluable, and much appreciated, as an informal public information and help point. It is also comfortable in the shop now as the heating issue has been resolved with an efficient electric air-con unit installed above the sales desk. This has meant that three wall radiators have been removed, making way for more sales shelving.

The first anniversary of the new daily service was celebrated on 28th November 2022 by Rail Minister Huw Merriman unveiling a plaque and revelling in the headline figure, "quarter of a million passenger journeys in the first year" on the Dartmoor Line. Remember that for the first 6 months it was only a two hourly service, before it became hourly. This

was well over the predicted figure. Clearly it reflects usage well beyond the town, which has a total population of perhaps 8,000. It is the railhead for the vast hinterland of West Devon and North Cornwall.

The whole Dartmoor Line Project has, so far, won 11 awards – so many that we now have a trophy cabinet in the Information Centre! On 22nd November I was lucky enough to be asked to go to Bristol to the Institute of Civil Engineering South West Awards. Along with Network Rail engineer Emma Lewis and media officer Don Breckon I proudly stood up on behalf of DRA to receive the Community Award, and then the final Showcase Award. It was an evening with real razzmatazz!

Other awards were received in London from the rail industry by many whom we regard as friends from within the industry, and who remain in contact and supportive. We are delighted that the following have accepted Honorary Membership of DRA:

- Ian Mundy GWR - Senior Portfolio Manager
- Matt Barnes GWR - Head of Strategic Delivery
- Christian Irwin NR - Director of the Rail Investment Centre of Excellence
- Richard Burningham - Manager of Devon and Cornwall Rail Partnership

Currently the Station has been nominated for other awards, now that the heritage ambience inside can be appreciated. The improvements include the Ticket Office with beautiful replica varnished wooden counter, stool with last station master Arthur Westlake's coat and hat. Racks for both day and season tickets with the heavy date stamp, paper pads for telegram messages, and special tickets, with ink pen, an ink well, not to mention the telephone on the wall with the codes for ringing through to the Okehampton or Meldon signal boxes.

Elsewhere we have more copies of the classic posters from the National Railway Museum including a glorious view of the beach at Bude on a new noticeboard on Platform 2. The parquet floors are going to have a further facelift.

The second Museum Room is open. The Meldon viaduct model first made by Mike Ellis, refurbished by John Coxon, and then set in the Dartmoor landscape with vegetation in the West Okement valley below by Graham Peacock, can now be examined closely in a table height cabinet.

Some of the 15 large boards originally displayed in the Museum Of Dartmoor Life (MoDL) in Okehampton explaining the history and reopening of the line are now also in Room 2, including the track laying machine in action.

The MoDL Curator Kristy brought them up along with items such as a sack truck and Arthur's jacket that we had loaned to her. She kindly showed us how to display and conserve some items (e.g. bubble wrap in the jacket!)

Upstairs above Platform 3 we now have an Archive Room. Just as the paint was drying a new volunteer arrived with an interest in the Museum. Local resident David Naylor is adding to his already extensive knowledge of the area while cataloguing and photographing all manner of items, papers, diagrams, postcards and photos that we are now able to bring together. It is so good to have a clear record.

Also upstairs we have a breakout/meeting room being furnished with Southern photos and paintings, with just the occasional nod to GWR locos!

The Signal Box is getting a facelift outside and inside. Andy Turner led the way with face mask to tackle the accumulated dust and dead flies. That was after Permanent Way clothing, Percy's play equipment (he was the cat evicted by the administrators), ex-buffet crockery, maps and diagrams had been removed in a careful way. Recent extraordinary times have already become history which needs remembering.

At Meldon we have a licence to look after Meldon Viaduct station. On 5th July there will be a Community Rail Event when Network Rail and

GWR volunteers will join us to clear four year's worth of weeds from the platform and improve the shelter [Report in this edition of the Pony].

For our rolling stock at Meldon, which has suffered from the weather and vandalism, there is finally a very bright light at the end of the tunnel, in the shape of a large indoor space which we call the Carriage & Wagon shed. Last week it passed into the possession of Aggregate Industries (AI), the quarry company, and as of yesterday I have received the first drafts for licence to use the area, and a lease to use the 08 shunter, Bluebell Mel.

So on that exciting and uplifting note we enter another new and exciting year on Dartmoor Railway. These are the ways forward:

1. To complete the 6 year tripartite lease on the station with GWR and NR, and to agree terms for the lease and licence at Meldon with AI.
2. Maintain and improve the station in all areas such as fences, flowers, seats and cleanliness.
3. Work towards a licence on the Signal Box and then on having the upper floor developed with a model railway layout and information display, to which the public will have supervised access.
4. To continue to develop the Museum and Heritage displays around the station and maintain an active link with the Museum of Dartmoor Life.
5. To attract more volunteer members for all areas, as we start to expand our operations.

So a big Thank you!

We are proud of our Dartmoor Pony Magazine - John Caesar and Geoff, of the flower tubs – Wendy; of the painting – Geoff Brooks and John Clarke; of the shop – Christine; and for “getting it done” – Ron; and to all the rest of the committee and volunteers; as well as members who just pop in with a cheery word or some books for the shop or an interesting photo, or simply for paying your subscription. Okehampton is lucky to have you all.

We are custodians of somewhere very precious.

Community Rail Teamwork at Meldon Viaduct Station

Wednesday 5th July dawned promising a little sunshine and serious showers. We saw a little sun but most fortunately the rain was not serious. So the team of 16 Network Rail, GWR and DRA volunteers were not held back, once an agreed route was established by Aggregate Industries' Mark Stephenson through the rising temperate jungle. The man of the moment was Graham Peacock who had developed a plan of action and made sure that we had brought the necessary equipment or the keys to get ladders etc. out of the Permanent Way shed.



The first party started on the Granite Way side scraping down and undercoating the outside sides of the shelter. The wood boards were pinned back in some places and the window frames tidied up and the wire grills re-secured.

The second group cleared vegetation from the east end of the platform right down to the gravel or “cat litter” surface as Tom calls it. The track and the platform wall were also cleared of buddleia and mainly birch seedlings. Yellow and black banded caterpillars of the beautiful cinnabar moth were left to eat down a small common ragwort.

The third group cleared down to strimming level the same gravel surface platform to the west, which was more seriously covered with bushes which were too established to always be pulled out. The conifer in the barrel was up in the platform light so had to come down. Then they set to on white lining the edge of the platform. This became a relay roller against time, not easy on a weathered rough concrete surface. But it was completed as the site was being cleared around them.

The fourth group cleaned down the inside surfaces and under the canopy of the shelter, where refreshments were served. Hot drinks from a storm kettle were slowly provided, while Edwards large pork pies and Leanne’s homity pie went down well, with cakes.

So it was lovely to hear our visiting volunteers Gabby, Will, David, Callum and Amanda saying that they had really enjoyed the day, organised by Maedoc (pronounced Me’oh) Ellis, worth their long rail journeys from Bristol, Swindon and Southampton. They would like to come back in September!

Their youthful injection of energy and enthusiasm was great. Everyone had a good natter, and sat on the edge of the platform relaxing when the sun did shine.

DRA Shop 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

Award for DRA Website

Sue Baxter

Dartmoor Railway Association receives Gold for its website at the 2023 Railfuture Awards Presentation in London on Saturday 15th July in the University of London Senate House.

After a smooth early morning trip up to Waterloo it was a pleasure to go to the prestigious empire state building style Senate House not far from Russell Square.



As Chair, I was very conscious of receiving the award in place of the real winner - Jon Kelsey.

The website was initiated by Peter Chapman, a Dartmoor Railway driver in 2011, with the help of his friend Richard Adams who runs a web design company called Flipside. Jon took it on a year or so later. In his own words he gives some clues to its success:

Our website is hosted by Richard Adam's company Flipside. The 'content management system' (i.e. website editing software) Richard provides makes a significant contribution to our site's effectiveness. It's very simple to use, which makes it easy to keep the site up to date, or to make structural changes (like extra sections and menus) as the association evolves. We don't have any control over cosmetic issues like fonts or arranging photographs on pages; although restrictive, this contributes to the site's clean, neat, consistent look, and for me means one less thing to worry about. Folks in the industry will say it looks dated, but I'm not particularly bothered. Are you?



Sue Baxter, Tim Steer and Andrea Davis receiving Railfuture awards

I've never paid much attention to what other sites are doing. Perhaps that's a good thing. I just try to describe and illustrate whatever seems relevant to DRA's interests. Apart from the fairly obvious general goals of keeping the site up to date and making it as easy and intuitive as possible to navigate, I try to achieve two specifics:

- To feature people in action whenever possible, to show the value of our volunteers and perhaps encourage others.
- DRSA/DRA membership has always been a blend of heritage railway enthusiasts and supporters of a public rail service for the local community. I try and reflect that balance, with bits of Okehampton railway history interest thrown in. Of course, that balance changed after 2020.

I'm very conscious of www.dartmoorline.com, and avoid just duplicating what they publish.

While Jon has kept extending it to meet current needs, the search tool at the top of each page keeps navigation easy. A big thank you Jon from all of us for your behind the scenes thoughtful, quick and constant work.

It is actually a Joint Gold Award for Website, as we faced stiff competition from Bedwyn Rail Passengers Group. Steve Smith and Bill Wells – both retired commuters, have been campaigning for Better Services for Kintbury, Hungerford and Bedwyn since 2006, against cuts, changes, delays and just being sidelined! They provide passengers with real time information, punctuality figures and information to make contact with the operator to claim refunds when services are cancelled. Just have a look on their website www.bedwyntrains.org.uk under the heading ‘More’ to see the campaign successes they have had due to gathering appropriate information. Inspiring and encouraging.

However it was Devon which took most Railfuture awards. Those of you who know the individuals will agree how hard and cheerfully they campaign.

Tim Steer - Best campaigner of the year (Gold).
Best use of social media for TRA/ACE Rail (Gold).
Best campaign ACE Rail (Bronze).

Andrea Davis - Judges special award for Devon County Council's dedication to providing and improving public transport and contribution to rail development. (Gold). This was a first for a county council to be recognised.



My return was delayed due to a tree down on the line earlier in the day. However that gave me a chance to appreciate recent changes to Waterloo. The upper Platforms 20 to 24 have a spacious concourse with beautifully curving wooden seating. Below is the striking 2022 National Windrush Monument “You called and We Came” (between 1948 and 1971).

Around the Station

Our beautiful 1870's Footbridge literally stands up into the worst of the weather. So it is receiving attention to some woodwork. Glazed window frames once sat on top of the bricks and the centres of some timbers are



soft. Seeing the new work take shape one can appreciate the artistic lines of our bridge even more, and also the challenging nature of the carpentry involved.



The Signal Box upper floor is now decluttered. No longer does it have four huge desks, 2 huge Cupboards, filing cabinets, photocopier and on the floor all manner of oils, train lamps, boots and of course Percy the cat's scratching post! It is recovering its airy, light interior after all the cleaning.

Geoff was glad to have the Signal Box to himself for painting the ceiling, when the rest were all down the line clearing Meldon Viaduct Station. The windows are all working again, thanks to Graham and Ron.



On 3rd May we were delighted to meet Theo who was born to Ems and Matt Barnes on the anniversary of the Reopening of the daily Service. Matt dreamt of reopening our line long before he saw it through as GWR Head of Strategic Service Development. It was a day for them to celebrate as a family taking the train for the first time together. Theo would

have loved to get his hands on the phone in the Ticket Office, but Dad restrained him!

Our archivist, David Naylor, has been making good progress on organising and documenting our growing collection of photos, maps and other interesting items and documents. Recently we have had some items donated by Allan Mounce, which belonged to his father Jack Mounce, who started work at Halwill Junction as a shunter in the late 1940s and later became a guard. He relocated to Exeter in 1967 until retirement in the late 1980s. Jack sadly passed away in 1996. Pictured are a fire bucket and lamp.

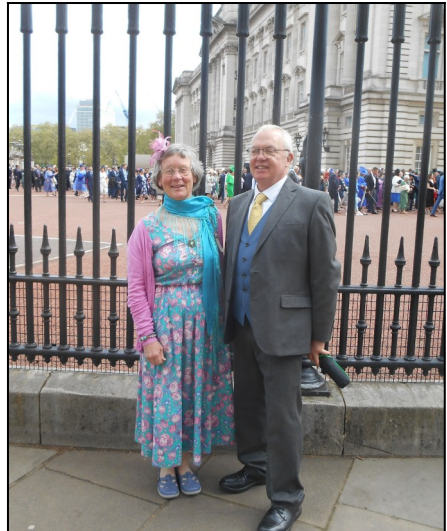


Coronation Garden Party

On Tuesday 9th May following the Coronation, Sue Baxter and Paul Vodden, as your Chair and Vice Chairman, accepted the invitation to the Coronation Garden Party.

The invite came via the Department for Transport and was a complete surprise. The day was really enjoyable with GWR seats booked on trains that ran well despite serious localised flooding.

Stood outside the Palace, the photo was taken when there was a short standstill in the 11,000 strong queue. But formalities were softened when the heavens threatened and we were allowed to break ranks and head for whatever shelter we could find. Fortunately the rain held off and we could enjoy the excellent tea including exquisite pea and mint sandwiches. We strolled round the 39 acres of formal and informal gardens around a lake and in amongst magnificent trees. There were also resident families of ducks and geese which took the crowds in their stride. As a former bandsman Paul appreciated the two bands which entertained us all afternoon.



Prince William and Kate, Prince Edward and Sophie, together with Princess Anne met guests formally and informally. However we got much closer to the Beefeaters, magnificent in their uniforms, who slowly but very efficiently managed the crowd by moving a few steps this way or that.

When we left through the far garden gate, the hidden calm was immediately replaced by the roar of police motorcycle outriders creating routes for dignitaries cars.

World Cup of Stations

Okehampton was shortlisted in the Rail Delivery Group's 2023 World Cup of Stations competition. The purpose is to identify the best loved station in each region - highlighting the work of the volunteers who support the stations - with an overall national winner crowned on May 26th. Okehampton was shortlisted with Yatton, Penmere and Liskeard in the South West. The competition was based on public voting.

Okehampton reached the semi-finals, before narrow defeat by Denmark Hill, themselves runners-up to the eventual winner, lovely Wemyss Bay on the Firth of Clyde. (It's pronounced 'Weems')

New Summer Sunday Gunnislake Dartmoor bus service

You can now turn a Sunday trip from Plymouth on the scenic [Tamar Valley Line](#) into a Dartmoor day out. It's thanks to a new bus service linking Gunnislake railway station, Tavistock and Princetown on Summer Sundays from 28th May to 24th September 2023. The daily 118 service goes from Okehampton to Tavistock and then, on Sundays, you can pick up the 198 circular bus route to Gunnislake or to Princetown.

Richard Burningham, Manager of the Devon & Cornwall Rail Partnership said: "This new Summer Sunday bus service will enable people to travel by the Tamar Valley Line and then take a very scenic trip by bus across to Tavistock and then Princetown. It will also provide a Sunday bus service for local people along the route. We hope it is a great success."

This new bus service has been made possible thanks to a grant from the Community Rail Development Fund, a joint initiative of the Department for Transport and the Community Rail Network.

<https://dcrp.org.uk/new-summer-sunday-gunnislake-dartmoor-bus-service-28-may-to-24-sept-2023/>

Marsh Barton station opening

After a lengthy period of construction, and expenditure of £16m, the new station at Marsh Barton opened on Tuesday 4th July 2023. The station is between Exeter St Thomas and Starcross, and will be served by Riviera Line trains between Exeter St Davids and Paignton.



On the eastern edge of the Marsh Barton trading estate, the station also provides handy rail access to Exeter's Riverside Valley park and the Double Locks pub. It will be served by local trains hourly throughout the day, increasing to half hourly in the morning and afternoon peak time.

DRA Members' Socials

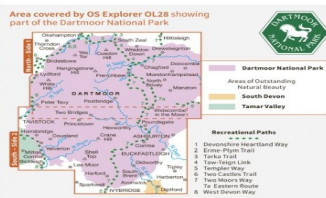
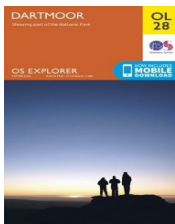
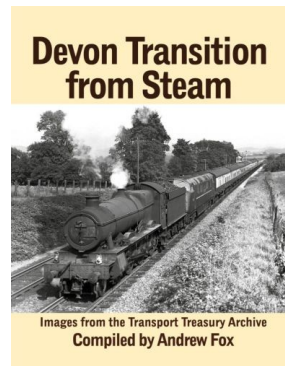
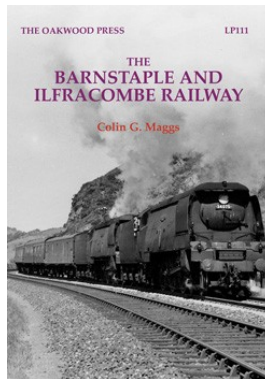
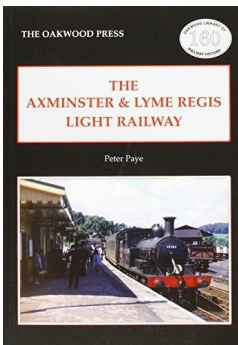
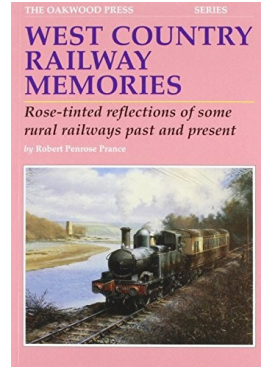
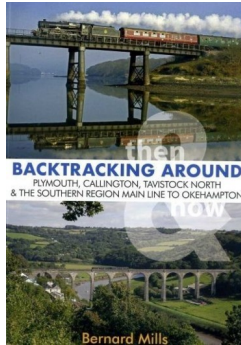
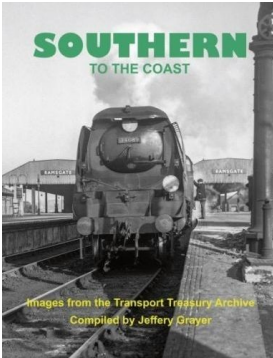
Dates for the upcoming 2023 DRA social evenings at the Taw River Inn, Sticklepath, Okehampton, EX20 2FG. Held on the first Wednesday of each month starting from 18:30. All DRA members are welcome!

- August 2nd
- September 6th
- October 4th
- November 1st
- December 6th

DRA Shop

Christine Horner

A growing selection of new railway books and OS maps are available to purchase from the shop, and mail order can also be arranged. Please visit the shop page for an up to date list and prices, and see the images below as a taster of what's available: <https://www.dartmoor-railway-association.org/shop>



HSTs in preservation

John Caesar

With the use of GWR Castle Class sets and the Cross-Country High Speed Trains (HSTs) in the southwest drawing gradually to a close, HST vehicles are making their way from mainline use into preservation. One such home for retired HSTs is the Colne Valley Railway (<https://www.colnevalleyrailway.co.uk>), situated in rural north Essex. It is the base of the 125 Heritage group (<https://125heritage.co.uk/>), and currently has 5 HST power cars in residence.



Former GWR power cars 43071 (left) with 43165 behind, and former EMR 43073.

They have two former East Midlands Railway (EMR) power cars, 43073 and 43082, and three former GWR power cars, 43071, 43023 and 43165. The EMR power cars were hauling 44058 TGS (Trailer Guard's Standard), 40706 TRFB (Trailer First Buffet), and 41088 TFO (Trailer First Class Open), all ex-LNER. Although the running line is short, at just under a mile long, it was an enjoyable visit with regular departures, friendly volunteers, a good on-board buffet service, and cab rides. Other attractions include a museum, miniature railway, model railway, and Travelling Post Office carriages and exhibition.



43023 (left) and 43071 (right) seen from the cab of 43082.



Also at the Colne Valley Railway, and of Southern interest, is SR 4-6-2 Merchant Navy Class no. 35010 'Blue Star'. Originally built at Eastleigh it entered service in July 1942 and was initially based at Salisbury to work trains on the Waterloo to West of England route. In 1950 it was transferred to Nine Elms

shed, London. It was rebuilt during 1956/57 and was then transferred to Bournemouth. It also worked from Exmouth Junction shed, but was withdrawn in 1966. 'Blue Star' was sent to be scrapped at Woodham Brothers of Barry. It was bought by the British Enginemen Steam Preservation Society (<https://www.besps.org/BESPS.htm>) in January 1985, without a tender. First it was moved to a site near the North Woolwich Old Station Museum, and then since 1996 has been at the Colne Valley Railway awaiting restoration.

Miah is miffed!

You can see why I am frequently feeling miffed! Other 4 legs are allowed on the station without my permission. JJ was allowed to wander even when the flooring was being sanded down, hoovered (aghh, there's the catch, I climb on a cooker when the roaring starts!!!) and the hardwax oil rolled on.



Admittedly although only a youngster he did seem to know where not to put his paws and was cringingly obedient. I forgive him because apparently he had a horrible mistress for a while, before he was taken away by Uncle Marcus and Nephew Adam. Everyone says the floors are so beautiful now. But I think that they would have more texture after a good scratching.

Pepe has only made one visit with his neighbour Christine and timed it perfectly to coincide with the Volunteers BBQ. Andrew and his assistant Sam did remember me but I had to wait for my sausage until most people had gone. Then I can power along the platform, dragging Tom behind me, without knocking anyone over unnecessarily.



Station Information

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>

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.

A photograph of the interior of The Bulleid Buffet cafe. In the foreground, there is a wooden table with a large green circular logo for 'THE BULLEID BUFFET' overlaid on it. The logo features a stylized white bird or train engine design. In the background, there is a glass display case filled with pastries and cakes, and a counter area with various items. The cafe has large windows and a bright, airy atmosphere.

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

Committee of the Dartmoor Railway Association

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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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Twitter: www.twitter.com/DartmoorRail

