

DARTMOOR RAILWAY
ASSOCIATION

The Dartmoor Pony

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Dartmoor Railway Association**

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Two Year Anniversary

The Dartmoor Pony

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

FRONT COVER: Ceremonial cake cutting at Okehampton station on 20th November 2023 to celebrate the second anniversary of the line re-opening (Photo: Dave Ellis).

BACK COVER: Top: Class 66 66113 on the Plymouth end of a late evening railhead treatment train (RHTT) in Okehampton Station on 5th October 2023 (Photo: Dave Ellis). Bottom: Class 150 150248 forming the 09:39 Okehampton service from Platform 2 at Exeter St Davids on 22nd November 2023 (Photo: J. Caesar).

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Chairman's Report

Sue Baxter

I am pleased to say that a Community Rail Day has again been the highlight of the past few months. You will see many of the same DRA volunteers in the picture, but this time we welcomed Network Rail volunteers to join us. Again we were blessed by fine weather with the beginning of autumnal tints, so Meldon looked its best and the five gents and one lady said it was a real break away from the office, in the fresh air down on the track chatting away.



Fence pailings were replaced, the shelter exterior got a top coat of paint, the platform surface was further improved and some stumps left last time removed. The bushes on the barrow crossing immediately got attacked by Christian on arrival and many others set to and cleared saplings from there right through to the points at the west end.

At the end of the day Meldon Viaduct Station felt as though it was breathing again, ready for a future. Tea and more cake was planned, but overtaken by rail events. Trains started being cancelled in advance of

the following strike day so, with their long journeys back home we broke up a little early. We had taken the chance during the lunch break to stroll over Meldon Viaduct.



You never know, but one of those youngsters may see through the reopening back to Plymouth. Tom Male currently oversees the Capital Projects delivered during Bank Holiday closures. Gareth Harvey is Head of Sponsorship; Charlie Fuller is involved in Benchmarking (the practice of comparing Network Rail processes and performance metrics, e.g. quality, time and cost, to industry bests and best practices from other companies). Alex Deas is Programme Director (Risk and Assurance) and Shaan Wood is Project Manager (Comms and Engagement). All are part of the Rail Investment Centre of Excellence created in 2021 which Christian Irwin now heads up. Having had their feet on the tracks we can hope that they already have an affinity with the line ahead!

Talking about reopening, the Department for Transport has been gleaning feedback through a widely distributed survey by Systra on the effects of this, the first and still the only project completed under the Restoring Your Railways designated funding. As I write we are

approaching the 2nd anniversary of the Reopening to Okehampton, and no doubt an update on passenger usage [see article on page 8].

Our volunteers have also been getting out and about, notably by GWR invitation to the Railway Museum at Swindon for a networking meet up over tea and cakes. This time Ron met up with a group of ladies who have taken on the maintenance of the flower displays at Dawlish and Teignmouth



since the 2014 storm and necessary refurbishment of Dawlish Station. They visited us on Wednesday 25th October bringing tulips. We shared plant tips and stories, not least of keeping displays watered in summer, and promised to make a return visit.

The Signal Box interior is now looking splendid. Our former Community Rail lead from Network Rail has moved on but we have great hopes of working equally well with his successor, and achieving the completion of a lease for its use by DRA. Then work can get started on an Okehampton Model Railway layout and exhibition.

Meanwhile outdoor work is being moved undercover, such as platform benches to receive a paint face lift and a leg up with new wooden feet! They have taken a trip round on a trailer to save struggling up and over the footbridge. Very careful work has gone into restoring the paintwork on the raised lettering of newly loaned metal signs. Museum Room 1 is receiving a facelift as the display boards are swapped with others on loan from the Museum of Dartmoor Life in the town.

Thinking about the station's greenery, the grassy bank under the Signal Box was probably strimmed late this year but we think the trees avoided getting lost or ring barked!

The planters on Platform 3, being sheltered under the canopy, have summer plants which refuse to stop flowering to make way for winter bulbs. Begonias, scented nemesias and antirrhinums in particular. The golden grasses will again be a feature this winter.

The Coaling Block Bed by the roundabout has been treated to a compost bin, and some woodchip in an effort to reduce the soil splashing from the heavy winter rain drops from the overhanging trees. Last year the plants almost disappeared. All four compost bins have in fact been on the move, three to a more convenient and efficient location at the end of the bay platform track. Before they were in the shade working very slowly and with not many worms, by Klondyke Bridge at the end of Platform 1.

We have started to see the small yellow card reader machines being used. Some retired railway employees have Oyster style pass cards which they use on them. Less interesting but essential to assist with station tidiness are three slim black cigarette butt holders now placed outside at the front of the station. Cigarettes do not make good compost in our planters! It goes without saying that the station is a no smoking/vaping zone. More visible but hopefully equally useful are two vivid pink “gum balls” to encourage users to dispose of their gum responsibly. The tannoy system has been off for a long time, initially likewise the passenger information display. The latter was restored months ago and we were very pleased once we had the correct time displayed again. However the initial volume of the tannoy was set to the industry standard to be heard over and above the noise of a train standing in the station. It was however very distracting at other times and we welcome the response made by Jane Jones, Head of Communications, once she was aware of concerns, to have it turned down.

Volunteering Wednesdays are full of banter, leg pulling, story telling and cake. If there are any members out there who have thought of coming, but not made it yet, come along and meet us. Our joint volunteer efforts mean we have a station and a service to be proud of and much appreciated by the general public.

Two Years of Trains!

Sue Baxter

It is hard to believe that we have just celebrated the 2nd anniversary of the reinstatement of daily passenger services to Okehampton! The area lost its service in 1972. The photo in our museum taken by Bernard Mills of the last train at Okehampton was a constant poignant reminder.

51 years on the cake cutting took place on a busy station, most passengers unaware of the occasion. We kept “well away from the platform edge” until the diesel unit had gone and then we raised a cheer for the photographers to record. The crew of the next train got to enjoy pieces of the celebration cake!

The figures are impressive. More than 550,00 passenger journeys in the first two years. That was achieved when the first 6 months of the service was two-hourly only and during a time when there have been rail strikes. David Whiteway and then Matt Barnes spoke for GWR. These figures are beyond expectations and indeed were the target figure to achieve in the fifth year of the service. So, as in many other aspects (under budget, ahead of time) the Dartmoor Line is showing the way ahead.

This was certainly not missed by the many dignitaries present from Tavistock (rail reconnection funded to delivery, subject to the business case), Hatherleigh, Okehampton, West Devon, Bude and Crediton, as well as Okehampton Hamlets where the new station will be built, two minutes from the A30 dual carriageway. The funding is in place for this and GWR project manager Charlotte Wheaton was there enjoying the cake and delicious scones with us. We look forward to working with her as stakeholders for this next project.

Above all it was great that 11 volunteer members of DRA were able to be there, opening the shop, moving the barrow for the cake out of the Information Centre and checking that everywhere was as tidy and clean as possible. The appreciation for their work in making Okehampton such a lovely station was much mentioned.

Prestigious National Railway Heritage Award

Sue Baxter

This was an uplifting occasion, seeing so much being done positively on the network. Everyone was fully appreciative of every one else's efforts, so in some senses it was not competitive, but it was still great to win our category!



Richard Burningham of Devon and Cornwall Rail Partnership nominated Okehampton Station for the Avanti West Coast Community Award. This is for the restoration of a Railway Building for Community use. We were in competition with two other shortlisted stations, Bishopstone Station on the line to Seaford, and Eynsford in the Darent Valley. Our station was nominated early in the year and then had two separate visits by judges, and a photographer. The full panel of judges met in the autumn.



Along with 30 other shortlisted projects we received an invitation to the ceremony which was held in The Merchant Taylor's Hall, Threadneedle Street, London, on 6th December 2023. There were well over a hundred attendees. It is a spacious building and we were seated in the Hall itself and afterwards had canapes and drinks in the cloisters and parlour. The food was delicious and we made sure to use the time to catch up with our friends in the railway industry before they shot off to other appointments.

To see the full 2 hour event go to www.nrha.org.uk. Our Category starts at around one hour. At the end Bill Reeves' clever address is worth listening to.



The line up on stage from left to right was: Andy Savage from NRHA who visited Okehampton before the reopening and was much taken by our signal box; Christian Irwin MBE, now Director of the Centre for Excellence in Rail Investment, who memorably stood on Platform 2 in 2020 looking across to Platform 3 and said he thought the industry could take on the building for use in its current form and colours; Tom Baxter your hard working Secretary who had his school lunch at the

station; enthusiast Paul Bryant of Parc Signs who has meticulously reproduced the correct signage and even the ticket office counter amongst other items; your Chair, Sue Baxter, who first put foot on the derelict station with a class of 11 year old students in 1975; Richard Burningham, who was first on the railway as a ticket clerk at Barnstaple and therefore was the ideal person to oversee the heritage restoration; Andy Mellor of Avanti West Coast; Matt Barnes, Head of Strategic Service Development for GWR, who long dreamt of reopening Okehampton.; Bill Reeves, Head of Transport for Scotland.



A change from the usual class 150s - GWR Class 166 'Networker Turbo' 166219 at Okehampton on a scheduled Sunday service on 24th September 2023 (Photo: Dave Ellis).

Membership & Volunteer Matters

Geoff Horner, Membership Secretary/Volunteer Coordinator

Once again we are approaching the end of the year with membership standing at 183 members. This is just five less than this time last year so we are close to maintaining the loss and gain balance.

As always it is a pleasure to welcome new members:

- Paul & Jo Burtenshaw in Chippenham
- David & Tom Mathews in the Isles of Scilly
- Richard & Judy Proctor in Axminster

Our membership continues to spread across England, Scotland and Wales!

It is now the time for the renewal of your membership, details of which are included with this magazine or separately in the post if you receive the magazine via email. The Association is now recognised as the custodians of the heritage of the railway at Okehampton. Your continued support is vital for us to maintain that role.

Turning now to volunteer activity the Station Maintenance team have been active throughout the year. The second museum room was brought back into its intended use as a museum and plans are in place for further improvement works to both rooms. The Post Office platform barrow was completely refurbished and now forms part of the floral display on platform 3. The flat above our shop on platform 3 has been redecorated throughout and now serves as a very useful archive and storage area. The former signal box has been cleared out and repairs, painting and general maintenance tasks completed ready for its planned future use for a model railway display. The floral displays on both platforms have been lovingly tended to throughout the year by our team of 'flower fairies' and as always the many varied tasks of general painting and maintenance have been enthusiastically dealt with

There has been no change in the situation at Meldon yard. Aggregate Industries continue to talk about a licence agreement for us to be able to operate at the Meldon quarry site but action remains elusive! Consequently the Carriage & Wagon group is, apart from essential repairs to our rolling stock, still in limbo.

Two volunteer events have taken place at Meldon when mixed teams of DRA volunteers joined forces with community volunteers from Network Rail and GWR to do weeding, minor repairs and repainting at the Network Rail owned Meldon Viaduct platform.



As always a huge thank you is due to all the volunteers, whatever tasks or teams you have worked on or with, for having once again worked hard throughout the year. However new recruits are always needed so if you can spare us a few hours of your time please do get in touch - g.horner936@btinternet.com

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 (apart from January) starting from 18:30.

All DRA members are welcome!

- Wednesday 10th January 2024
- Wednesday 7th February 2024
- Wednesday 6th March 2024
- Wednesday 3rd April 2024

Magazine Contributions Invited

We invite contributions for the magazine of items likely to be of interest to members – photos, memories, articles, history. Our deadline for material for the next magazine is 1st March 2024.

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

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

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>

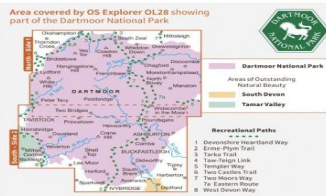
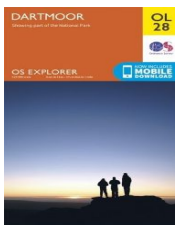
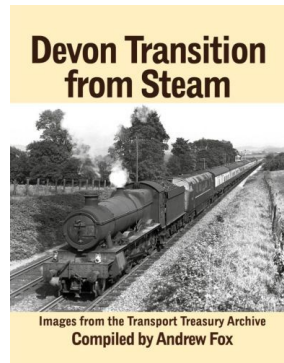
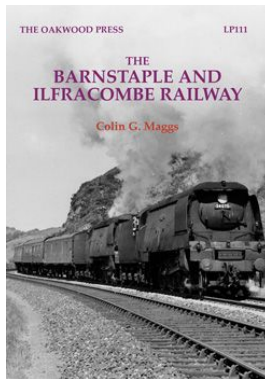
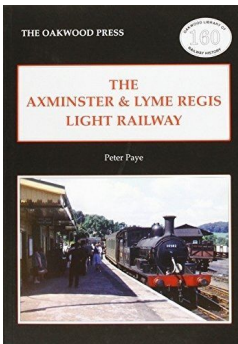
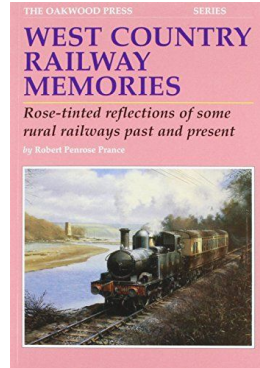
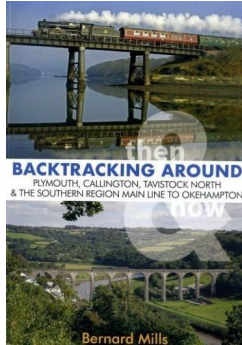
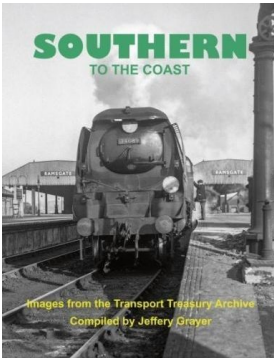
The shop also stocks a selection of local hand crafted candles, glassware, jewellery, cards etc which make ideal gifts. There is also a selection of DRA and Dartmoor Line souvenirs. Do visit the shop when/if you are in Okehampton.



Books available to purchase

Remember that we have a range of new railway books to buy from our shop, or via mail order. 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>



Arthur Westlake Museum & Archive

David Naylor

Over the past year, the slow process of scanning of various documents, artefacts, photos and postcards held by the Dartmoor Railway Association has continued apace, and is still continuing. We are grateful to the various people who have loaned/donated items of interest to us and we'll be looking to display many of these items as the refurbishing of the Museum develops. Here are just a few of the photos on loan to us from the Richard Passmore collection:



This photo, taken in 1885, shows Mr Passmore on the left with his horse and cart, his wife Ellen is the lady dressed in black on the far right. Mr Passmore was the appointed delivery agent for the London & South West Railway (LSWR). The arch in the photo (directly behind Ellen) is still in place today, to the left of which today, is a manicure studio.

Below, taken in 1893, is a view of Okehampton Station looking West. Notice the footbridge isn't much changed to what we see today.



The two pictures following were taken on June 12th 1947 of the naming of 'West Country' class steam locomotive 21C113 (BR34013) *Okehampton* in the Military Sidings beyond the station towards Meldon.

The first photo shows the Mayor of Okehampton, W.S. Passmore, leaning out of the cab.

The locomotive was built in Brighton in October 1945 and withdrawn from service in July 1967. After its' final journey to Waterloo on the 7th July of that year *Okehampton* was finally disposed of as scrap at J. Cashmore Ltd. in Newport, South Wales.



From Samarkand to Tashkent by rail

Paul van der Linden

Travelling by train in foreign climes can be fraught: goats and chickens on the platform, guards and food sellers shouting, porters touting for business, garbled announcements on the PA and crowds of people randomly milling around. So it was with



trepidation that I took a train journey in September this year from Samarkand to Tashkent in Uzbekistan where I was on holiday.

I was travelling in a group, and our guide made all the reservations and ticket purchases in advance, so that was one less thing to worry about – the ticket cost £10. We arrived at Samarkand station (pictured) an hour before our departure time, and had to go through airline style security screening before being allowed into the station building. Inside the station foyer it was bright, clean and not crowded, which put me in a relaxed mood. Obviously my fears of train travel, based on journeys in Africa, India and South America were not applicable here.



The railways in Uzbekistan were built in the late 19th century when the country was occupied and run by Imperial Russia. Samarkand station opened in May 1888 and is on the trans-Caspian railway, with steam being replaced by diesel in

the mid 1970s. The current station building dates from the 1980s, just before the Soviet Union gave independence to Uzbekistan along with many other former Soviet states. The rails, power, signalling and rolling stock are more recent and look well maintained. Freight trains were present with many moving through the station (pictured).



Back in the foyer I searched the departure board for our train, the 17:11 to Tashkent, the capital of Uzbekistan.

The electronic board rotated between Russian, Uzbeki and English, and the photograph shows it in English, despite which I could not understand some of the terms.



Our train arrived on platform 1 on time and was a Spanish designed Talgo 250 called the Afrosiyob, capable of reaching 250 km/h.



We found our seats as it was reservation only with no standing tickets sold. The carriage was clean, roomy, air conditioned, while the seats were comfortable with plenty of leg room and a power socket.



Wifi was not onboard, but there were four small screens per carriage, located on the ceiling on which information and programmes were shown (pictured). Half way through the journey free coffee and a cheese roll were distributed from a trolley, with an option to buy other food and drink if

desired. This was the economy class travel, other options were business class and VIP class, which I imagine would have been very nice.

The journey of 205 miles was covered in two hours forty minutes, making an average speed of 75 mph including one stop, so not getting close to the top speed the engine is capable of. We arrived on time in Tashkent where it was now night, but in the high 20s temperature-wise and soon found our taxi who took us to our hotel. A nice train on a well run railway, I give it five out of five stars for an online rating!



Tashkent station

Online Fundraising

Please consider using easyfundraising every time you shop online!

www.easyfundraising.org.uk/causes/drsa

Please contact our Treasurer, Christine Horner, if you would like more information: christine.horner@talk21.com

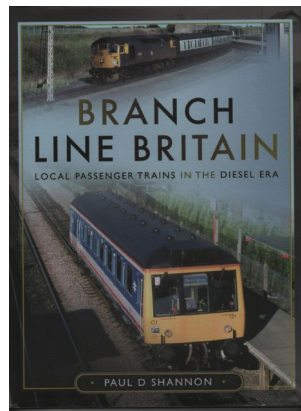
Book Review: Branch Line Britain

Dana Wiffen

Local Passenger Trains in the Diesel Era, Paul D.Shannon, Pen & Sword publishers, RRP £30

Following the Beeching cuts of around 4,000 lines between 1963 and 1970, this book concentrates on those that managed to survive the cuts, some only just.

BR had set about replacing old rolling stock that had taken over from steam hauled trains including early generation DMUs & EMUs that had been introduced in the 1950s & 1960s. The 1980s had also seen the introduction of low cost Pacers with many lasting until recently when Heritage Lines have snapped them up to run on their lines for the same reasons.



Each chapter covers the country by regions starting with South West England and finishing in Scotland. Each of the 8 regions/chapters has around 20 photos. Photos included were taken between 1973-2022, with most of them in colour and a few B&W, while all capture the charm of branch lines which still attract such a lot of interest today.

The gradual change of policy when realising that the potential of reopening small stations that would attract extra business has seen various stations added to the network between 1990-1994 and continuing with less pace up until the hand over to private operators. We are informed that between 2005 and 2015 four more branch lines have been reopened and as we know others have opened since.

While books on Branch Lines are numerous this one captures the wide variety of DMUs & EMUs used across the UK while offering optimism for the continuing reopening of more lines in the future.

Miah's Diary

Some people think I am very forward. I cannot think why. After all, I have the physique and nature to just slip through anywhere. And I do. However I admit I am often not sure where I am going or why I choose to go there. I bark at trains less now, having heard them for two years and I do not often get a chance to chase them. Sometimes I think it would be good just to head off down Station Road and I pull my two legs with all my might in that direction. However when there is the sweet smell of Pat's sausage all else leaves my mind. I am like a coiled spring waiting, more obediently these days, for his command to "eat". He seems to have been taught by my two legs not to let me just help myself as soon as his sandwich box is open a crack.



Now, fireworks and loud bangs of any kind, what do you think my reaction is? Well they are obviously monsters and must be chased away! I am successful because they always stop, and I return triumphant. BUT Hoovers are different, they only have one way breathing, which is unfathomable. At home I get the protection of my cage.

But the other day I was full of sausage and relaxing in our Staff Only Room when the hoover pipe was moved. I knew the only safe place was off the floor and up as high as possible, not on a chair but on the worktop, and even then I was ready to run further. Fortunately two legs noticed my plight, the hoover pipe was left still (thankfully it wasn't switched on) and I allowed myself to be lifted down, still shaking.

So, when I am full of sausage, what do you think is my ideal night out? Chasing bubbles in a stream and putting my nose right under the water to find the biggest and best black stones!! I pull them out, parade around with them, offer them to my two legs (they never seem impressed) and then decorate the bank or the moor behind with them. Never mind if they were part of a ford or dam. Children like to build them back again.

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, a large green circular logo with a white steam locomotive and the text 'THE BULLEID BUFFET' is overlaid. The background shows a counter with a display case containing pastries, a coffee machine, and a person behind the counter. There are tables and chairs in the foreground, and a window with a view of the outside.

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

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Vice-Chairman: Paul Vodden

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Treasurer: Christine Horner

Membership Secretary & Volunteer Coordinator:

Geoff Horner

Committee Members:

Ron Kirby, John Caesar

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