

DARTMOOR RAILWAY
ASSOCIATION

The Dartmoor Pony

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Dartmoor Railway Association**

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Tree-mendous

The Dartmoor Pony

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Editor: John Caesar

E-mail: museum@dartmoor-railway-association.org

Dartmoor Railway Association

Address: Dartmoor Railway Association,
Okehampton Station, Station Road,
Okehampton, EX20 1EJ

E-mail: info@dartmoor-railway-association.org

Website: www.dartmoor-railway-association.org

Facebook: www.facebook.com/dartmoorrailwayassociation

X (Twitter): x.com/dartmoorrail

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

FRONT COVER: Apple tree planting in December 2024, Star of Devon to east and Tom Putt to west (Photo: Tom Baxter).

BACK COVER: Top: Class 158, 158762, at Okehampton on 15th March 2025. Bottom: The model of Fatherford Viaduct on the new model railway in the signal box with a Hornby model of West Country Pacific 34030 'Watersmeet' hauling the 'Devon Belle' (Photos: John Caesar).

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Chairman's Report

Sue Baxter

The range of Dartmoor Railway Association (DRA) activities and responsibilities at Okehampton Station almost make volunteers from other stations glaze over. Either wishing they had even one room to call their own, or glad that they don't have so many lease arrangements to keep an eye on!



So it was really pleasing that nine volunteers turned out on 7th February, a Thursday and normally a non-working day for us, to greet a group of Station Managers from across the Great Western Railway (GWR) network, hosted by our own Station Manager Melanie Harvey. Asking to take a combined photo they were amazed at the number and were reassured, yes all are active volunteers! Hence the wide angle of the photo in the shop to include everybody. It was good to hear again appreciation of Okehampton, but also not to feel complacent when some stations apparently face persistent vandalism and unpleasantness.

Up at Meldon there is a new company, Meldon Aggregate Limited, which took over the quarry, at the start of January. They immediately got to work on the basics, and started improving all the roads and access points, clearing the scrub and revealing our carriages to full view in the process. However there is an on-site night watchman in his truck and overall security seems much better. Some ground levels have been lowered and ditches made which have visibly improved the drainage situation, which was dire. The sphagnum moss which entirely covered some rails has gone, along with the bushy overgrowth. A new weighbridge and weighbridge office is in place. There are various diggers, dumper trucks, and a mobile crusher already sorting surface material. The new owners are understandably working hard getting to grips with the stone business, which compliments their existing construction works. We will be having more detailed discussions with them once their operations plan is in place. “The medium-term ambition is to look to facilitate a licence to enable the re-establishment of the heritage railway, however until we are operational, we still do not know our full site requirements, until then, we permit DRA access to maintain and look after their interests.”

The Dartmoor and Tarka Lines were closed for engineering works during the second week of March. The programme included slewing the track into final position for the new Okehampton Interchange station, and other infrastructure work and surveys along our line. DRA did press for a bus replacement timetable to be issued in advance. This did not happen but we made it known that this would have helped so many passengers whom we met that week to make better plans. Shop staff in particular but any other volunteers around are always sought out to give up to date information and it is definitely something we need.

Work on the footbridge is finally coming closer, Devon County Council having overcome several hurdles.

Ron Kirkby and Graham Peacock went to the launch of the Folklore Library and Archive at Crediton with a DRA table. The event featured railway memorabilia and recordings of people’s memories including our own Gerald Smallacombe who talks very clearly about his steam days.

Gerald is looking forward to making another visit to the see the Signal Box model railway again, as soon as his health permits.



On 26th March Ian Mundy, GWR Senior Portfolio Manager, brought a group of Project Managers and apprentices to Okehampton. We had the chance to chat to two who are developing the heritage side of Castle Carey station and also meet the ladies responsible for the coming refurbishment of Exeter St Davids, and for our own Okehampton Interchange station. We will be attending stakeholder meetings for the latter.

A former lorry driver from Northlew gave me some insights into activity round the station in its later years. He remembered going to collect sugar beet pulp. It came in tall heavy 100wt hessian sacks. It would ooze out so he protected himself by opening a bag and covering his head. He also drayed (carried) bags of nuts from the station and dry slag for the farms. Slag came in smaller but still heavy 100wt paper sacks. It was dreadfully dusty and horrible if you got it over yourself. But he couldn't collect on wet days because his lorry wasn't covered. He also drayed Meldon stone in 10 tonne lorries as far as Tedburn for the bypass. 10 loads a day going out past the Railway Cottages (long gone) at Meldon.

At Okehampton Station he said “Now Arthur (Westlake, last station master) he really kept order. He’d say “wait your turn” and with his clipboard he’d say “Make sure the numbers are right!” Why did he say that? He could see the numbers on the side of the wagon! Yes, he was strict, but that’s probably why he kept Okehampton going so long. You need types like that.”

A Guard called Gary on GWR trains still wears heritage uniform (when it is not too hot!) It was a treat to see him on our station chatting with Ian Mundy.



Finally, a different peek into a volunteer’s life. Afternoon tea at Exeter’s Rougemont Hotel courtesy of our Community Rail manager Nicole Black. Designed effectively as an opportunity for networking with other GWR station volunteers, from Chippenham, Freshford, Torquay and Gunnislake to name but a few. Volunteer Alan can be spotted in the centre at the top table beyond the cake stand:



**Thank you to all our volunteers, members and supporters -
Okehampton Station would be lost without you!**

In Memory of David Anstee

Sue Baxter

About 15 people from DRA and the Bulleid Buffet attended David's funeral at Cheriton Bishop showing the wide affection in which he was held. Also two senior members of GWR staff along with flowers representing the thoughts of many of the train crews, particularly those who saw him late at night. From his family we learnt a little of his very varied life including RAF maintenance, ski instructor, working on a freighter between Japan and Australia, film crew in London and walking across the Sahara. In his early days he slept under the stars on top of the water tank in the garden. He lived around the station through six winters. The following is the tribute read by Sue at the lovely reception after the funeral held at the Post Inn, organised by his siblings.



As everyone knows, David was a one off, but with many sides. I came to know him through his love of the countryside, as a fellow camper. When I first met him in August 2019 he was drying his clothes on the fir trees near the old car park, around the headless railway statue "Waiting for The Train". Perfectly reasonable for anyone camping. We used to exchange stories about birds, trees, flowers and dogs. He even found a training manual to help us with our rescue dog Miah.

He became fiercely protective of the station, whether reminding evening miscreants of the CCTV watching them, picking up platform litter, clapping his hands to warn off magpies or crows who were intent on raiding the swallow's nest behind Room 1 on Platform 2, or firing gravel across the tracks at rats.

He had absolutely no time for rude rough sleepers and made known that the British Transport Police should be informed. We got told off by some people for not helping him get “proper” accommodation. But when they approached him themselves, they received the usual brush off and sideways talk that went nowhere. Learning he was not going to appreciate the help they were keen to offer, they soon went away, puzzled.

In the evenings David kept a friendly eye open for the station and the passengers. But that was not to say that he was very critical of the railway. The trains were noisy and gave off diesel fumes. So he would put his hands over his ears, use earplugs, or simply walk away upwind as the train approached. He slept best at night before the permanent station lighting was installed. Then he complained bitterly, not only for himself, but of course also on behalf of the bats.

He will be remembered as our night watchman, the best and perhaps the only one Okehampton Station will ever have.

Notice of 2025 DRA Annual General Meeting

All members are warmly invited to our AGM which will be held at the Ockment Centre, Okehampton, on Wednesday 28th May between 6.30 and 8.30pm. Light refreshments will be available and the meeting will be followed by a railway themed film or films.

The timing allows members to arrive and depart by train. Free parking is available in the Market Street (Waitrose) car park from 6.00pm. **Please DO NOT park in the adjacent Lidl car park – you will be charged!**

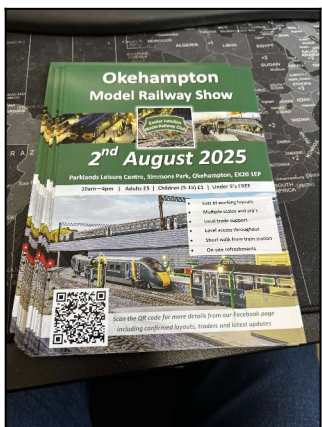
DRA Members' Socials

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

- Wednesday 4th June 2025
- Wednesday 2nd July 2025
- Wednesday 6th August 2025
- Wednesday 3rd September 2025
- Wednesday 1st October 2025

Okehampton Model Railway

The model railway team have made great progress on the layout in the signal box with a particularly stunning representation of Fatherford Viaduct (see photo on back cover).



A date for your diaries is the **Okehampton Model Railway Show** on 2nd August 2025 at Parklands Leisure Centre, Simmons Park, Okehampton, EX20 1EP. It runs from 10am-4pm, and is £5 for adults (children £1, under 5s free). Featuring lots of layouts, multiple scales and eras, local trade support, on-site refreshments, level access, and just a short walk from the station! Organised by Exeter Junction Model Railway Club, Okehampton.

<https://www.facebook.com/p/Exeter-Junction-model-rail-club-83C-Okehampton-100094091329599/>

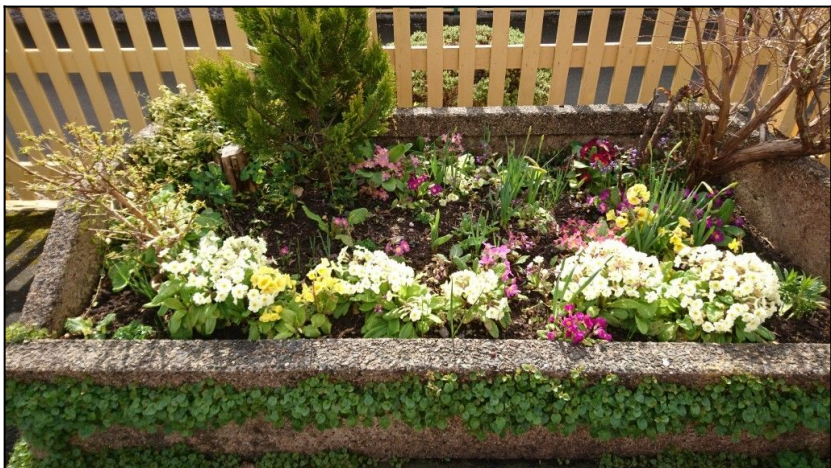
Station Gardening

Wendy Ware – Volunteer Flower Fairy

Sue Baxter and I have been busy tending to the flowers on Platforms 2 and 3. We have a lovely display of primulas in the ballast boxes on Platform 2. As well as pots filled with daffodils.



On Platform 3 the flower tubs are looking good. The Camellia shrub has now flowered. Later on we will be planting geraniums, begonias and trailing lobelia in the oak barrels, they looked lovely last year.



We were delighted to receive The Gold Award for the Stations In Bloom competition last year for our efforts as well as what the working gang do to keep the station looking spick and span.



We do get some lovely comments from the passengers, thanking us for our efforts.



DRA Members' Library

A reminder that we have a collection of books on (mostly) West Country railway themes. Current local DRA members are welcome to borrow from the library. The latest list is shown here:

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

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

The Bookstall

Our DRA shop, 'The Bookstall', on Platform 3 at Okehampton station opens on Wednesdays, Fridays, Saturdays, Sundays and Holiday Mondays throughout the year thanks to the dedicated team of volunteers who make this possible. As well as the varied selection of 'previously loved' railway books and DVD's available in the shop, new railway book titles are available to order online via the DRA website:

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

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

Magazine Contributions Invited

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

The Long Viaduct of the Law

David Hunt

On 16th March 2025 I went to Okehampton with the intent of walking the cycle path to Meldon Quarry to inspect the state (growth of vegetation) of the railway line and see what had been done at Meldon Quarry following a report that the Quarry was being brought back into production and work had already started on the site.



Whilst on the cycle path I noticed that there was a particularly large amount of undergrowth outside of the eastern portal of the tunnel but was not able to get into a position to photograph it. Being intent on getting a shot I went on to where the cycle path goes through the tunnel and after very little trouble I made my way on to the verge behind the crash barrier of the westbound carriageway of the Okehampton Bypass. As traffic flows permitted I crossed to the central reservation where I found a route through the bushes to the eastbound carriageway which I then crossed and made my way to a position above the railway east portal and took a photograph.

My next move was to retrace my way to where I had started. I had completed my journey to the final crossing of the westbound carriageway and whilst waiting for a suitable gap in the traffic I saw a

police car with light flashing coming towards me. Having a good guess what was about to happen, and seeing the police car slowing, I crossed in front of it and the police car stopped where I was standing. At that time I was less than 50 yards from where I could, and would have, made my way back to the cycle path and on my way to Meldon. My protests that I was in no danger with a barrier to protect me from traffic for such a short distance I was still told that it was too dangerous and that I had to get in to be taken to the lay-by some way ahead, which I reluctantly did.

At the lay-by we had a discussion about what I had been doing and where I was going. I told him that I was on my way to the cycle path which runs parallel to Meldon Quarry and he said he would take me there. Not knowing where he was going to I protested but he said he knew where I was wishing to go to and he reassured me that he could take me there.

We set off on the dual carriageway and then through country lanes until he stopped and asked his companion to open a gate on the right and another gate inside, which he did, and we drove on to what could have been another country road. Not knowing where I was I asked if this was the cycle path to which the reply was “Yes”. I still did not recognise the path I asked if this was the Tavistock side of Meldon Viaduct to which the answer was once again “Yes”.

After overtaking walkers and cyclist who were very surprised to be interrupted by a police car, I suggested that it may be somewhere near Meldon Junction to which he also replied “Yes”. He was what I would call a younger person and I was surprised to find out how much of the redundant railway system he had knowledge of.

A few minutes later Meldon Viaduct loomed large in front of us and the police car took me across to the site of the former café where he said that he could go no further and turned around to go back.



I thanked him and said I had one more favour and asked if I could photograph the police car to which he replied “Yes”. He then retraced his route over the viaduct to perform his other duties.

I am probably one of the few who have crossed Meldon Viaduct by train, foot and police car (one way only) but will probably have to miss out on a trip in the opposite direction.



Work at Meldon Quarry on 15th March 2025 (photo: J. Caesar)

A Trip to the South Devon Railway Winter Steam Gala

Graham Peacock

A visit to the South Devon Railway (SDR) is always something to look forward to, and back in early January I had two good reasons to head in that direction. Firstly we needed a few scenic items for the DRA model railway in the signal box at Okehampton, and also the SDR Winter Steam Gala was being held on the weekend of 4-5 January.



2807 under the footbridge at Buckfastleigh.

On this occasion I had decided to travel by rail, rather than drive across the moor. It was a cold grey morning, rather typical of January, and I was glad to get aboard the 8.30 train at Okehampton for the first leg of the journey. There was only about a ten minute wait at St David's before the GWR stopping train to Penzance arrived for the onward trip to Totnes. Heading down the Exe estuary, the tide was clearly at its peak, with the sea lapping close to the track, while on the opposite side a large herd of deer grazed in the grounds of Powderham Castle. Along the sea wall towards Dawlish, the high tide was causing some sea spray to drift across the track, despite the light breeze and the sea being only choppy. There were brief stops at Dawlish, Teignmouth and Newton Abbot before arriving at Totnes at about ten o'clock. There is about a ten

minute walk from the main line station to the SDR terminus at Totnes Riverside, crossing the River Dart on the way.

The Gala, which ran from Friday 3rd to Sunday 5th January, featured four locomotives in steam. These were the SDR based pannier tank 6412, small prairie 5526, ex GWR 2-8-0 freight loco 2807, visiting from the Gloucester Warwickshire Railway, and Peckett saddle tank 1940 visiting from the Bristol Harbour Railway.



5525 and 6412 at Totnes Riverside

Unfortunately the Peckett developed some mechanical problems on the Friday, so was under repair on the Saturday, but the remaining three locos were more than enough to maintain a comprehensive timetable.

When I arrived at Totnes, 6412 was in the run around loop with an auto coach. It was due to run a later shuttle service to Staverton, halfway along the line, and a favourite haunt of photographers who can view trains in both directions. 5526 soon arrived with the next service to Buckfastleigh. Running three regular services on a line designed for a maximum of two is a complex business. Once 5526 is at the platform, the auto train proceeds a short distance up the track towards

Buckfastleigh, while 5526 runs around it's train. It then returns to the loop to allow the Buckfastleigh train to depart. The South Devon Railway closely follows the River Dart, and at one point where the river was particularly close there was a 5 mph speed limit, perhaps an indication that the river is getting too close and some remedial work may be necessary. If so it will need to be carried out without inconveniencing the river fish stock or annoying the local dormice, quite a challenge for railway staff.



6412 and autococh in the run around loop at Totnes

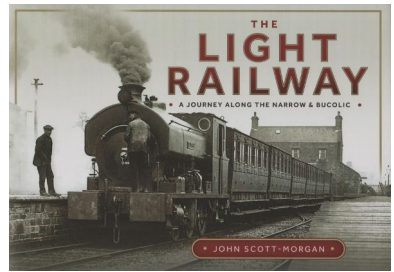
Arriving at Buckfastleigh, I had time to browse the well stocked gift and model shop and enjoy a tasty lunch at the station cafe before watching 2807 arrive with the next service. I joined this service for the return trip to Totnes. A brisk walk back to Totnes mainline station allowed me to catch a Cross Country service back to Exeter, then the next connection to Okehampton, arriving at 3.15pm. By this time, light snow was falling, and I was not sorry to see Alison arrive with my lift home to Bridestowe.

The event on the SDR seemed to be well attended, and despite the loss of one loco, very well organised, a credit to all involved.

The Light Railway – Book Review

Dana Wiffen

A journey along the Narrow & Bucolic
By: John Scott-Morgan Pages: 226
Pen & Sword Books RRP: £25.00



Author John Scott Morgan has been writing railway books for over 50 years, his books include “The Light Railway Era”, “Branches & Byways”, “The East Kent Railway - The Line that went to nowhere” and “Colonel Stephens Railways - A pictorial survey”, so his latest book promised to be another treat. This is a superb pictorial journey supported by 216 black and white photos. It starts in Jersey then moves across mainland England before crossing into Scotland then onto to Ireland which has the biggest section, it finally finishes in the Isle of Man.

The Light Railways Act of 1896 opened up the opportunity for many unusual and different railways to be built - this book will also not disappoint Colonel Stephen’s enthusiasts as it includes no less than 14 of his lines. (see below)

Included lines of interest to the West Country - Plymouth & Devonport & South West Junction Railway, North Devon & Cornwall Junction Light Railway, Western Clevedon & Portishead Light Railway.

Other railways covered include: South East - Selsey Tramway, Rye & Camber Tramway, Rother Valley Railway (K&ESR), East Kent Railway, and The Sheppey Light Railway. Welsh Borders & Midlands - Snailbeach District Railway, Shropshire & Montgomeryshire Light Railway, Ashover Light Railway. Wales - Burry Port & Gwendraeth Valley Light Railway, Ffestiniog, and Welsh Highland Railway.

Many of these Light Railways which served rural communities and industries have long since gone. Favourites such as Bishops Castle Railway and the Wisbech & Upwell Tramway are included with lesser

known such as Cleobury Mortimer & Ditton Priors Light Railway and The North Sunderland Light Railway with a photo of a station named “Sea House”, plus Wolverton & Stony Stratford Tramway.

Also included are those now resurrected as Heritage Railways with Ravenglass & Eskdale, Derwent Valley and Welshpool & Llanfair as examples and there are a couple on the comeback trail like Gwendraeth Valley Railway and Glyn Valley Tramway.

This book will be enjoyed by enthusiasts that love the unique budget lines that once played an important part in industrial and rural communities.

Photographs for each railway are mostly represented with an on average three for each railway, although a few have less and a couple have more. This book will evoke memories of good old days of steam and it manages to capture the days of rural light railways that in most cases offered both passenger and goods traffic.

Online Fundraising

Please consider using easyfundraising every time you shop online!

www.easyfundraising.org.uk/causes/drso

Many well known online shops take part, including Amazon, John Lewis, eBay, M&S, Tesco.....

Each time you shop via easyfundraising, a small donation makes it's way to the Dartmoor Railway Association at no extra cost to you!

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

Rails around Vietnam

Paul van der Linden

In February my wife and I went to Vietnam on holiday and took two overnight sleeper train journeys covering the length of the country from Hanoi in the north to Ho Chi Minh City in the south. We also enjoyed the tourist spectacle of Railway Street in Hanoi where trains run up and down the street. You can eat in a trackside restaurant and go shopping while the trains pass just a few feet away. Railway street is about half a mile from the main station in Hanoi, so trains are running slowly (under 20 mph) as they are either just leaving or about to enter the station. Trains run every forty minutes but the timetable is very relaxed, just like the Health and Safety rules!



Railway Street in the daytime between trains (left) and the train trundling past the restaurant where I was eating (right).



The lovely new station at Da Nang - it was clean spacious, air conditioned and had free wifi. Passengers are held back in the waiting area until the train arrives, and then the doors to the platform are opened, tickets checked and you are permitted to board. Outside the station is an old steam locomotive, probably French as Vietnam was a former French colony.

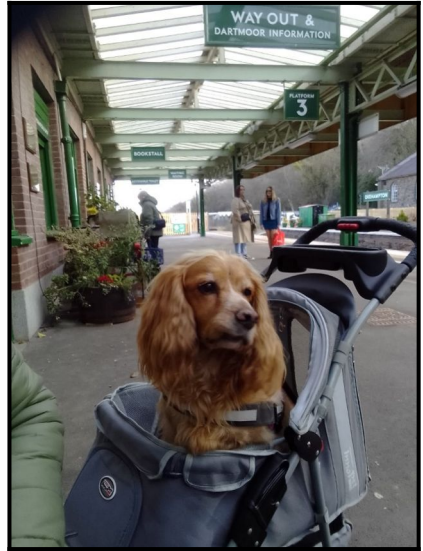


The dining car on the overnight train from Hanoi to Da Nang - I do not recommend the coffee. I enjoyed a birthday breakfast in this car, on the traditional but rock hard wooden seats.

Miah's Diary

Bark! Bark! Well for once that's going to be all from me! I am going to report on the interesting four and two paw visitors to the station that we have had.

First up is a beautiful Lady called Fudge with floppy brown ears quite unlike my pointed ones. She was very friendly and shared her rambling experience. Fudge is 14 years young and enjoys a 10 minute walk but after that her back legs go floppy. So she accompanies her two legs, riding in her chariot.



Coming towards Okehampton along the Granite Way her two legs companion was getting a little bit anxious about how far it was to the Bulleid Buffet. So she enquired and was told it was just a mile. 15 minutes later she enquired again and was told it wasjust a mile. Later on she asked a gent who had a proper gismo. He consulted it and said it showed he had walked exactly 1.2 miles from the Station. Fudge said they both bucked up when they found the Buffet within 10 minutes. Even better Kelly came out from the Buffet with a container of water so she could drink sitting regally in her chariot.

I didn't get to meet Febe, but she isn't trusted to be let out of her windowed back pack! A rescued Meyers Parrot she came to watch over the planting of two Apple Trees on the bank below the Signal Box (*see front cover*). The trees were donated by the British Beekeeping Association to celebrate their 150th Anniversary. The varieties are Tom Putt and Star of Devon. The spring flowers are very attractive for pollinating insects, and then will have lovely looking autumn fruit to be eaten by people or birds! We attempt to look after all creatures at our station! However Febe needs a special mention because she has been on

the train to Crediton and also been on a walk across Dartmoor back to the station.




Bailey represents the Pussy train travelling Public. Very well mannered she likes to have her cover folded down on her train journeys. Then she is very talkative and engages with other passengers. A 4 year old Bengal cat, she was enjoying the trip to Brixham for a few days holiday. Beforehand she was relaxing on one of our green benches. With her fish eye window rolled down I could see she was very cosy on a beautifully knitted blanket.



On Thursday 17th April, a delegation from DRA made a return visit to the Friends of Crewkerne Station. The visit included a conducted tour of the station, followed by a minibus ride (or walk) into town to for lunch, and then a leisurely stroll on a tour of the town.


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.



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

Okehampton Train & Bus Information

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



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

Committee of the Dartmoor Railway Association

Chairman: Sue Baxter

Secretary: Tom Baxter

Treasurer: Christine Horner

Membership Secretary & Volunteer Coordinator:

Geoff Horner

Committee Members:

Ron Kirby, John Caesar, Liz Westlake, Ged Kirby

Dartmoor Railway Association Contacts

Enquiries:	info@dartmoor-railway-association.org Dartmoor Railway Association, Okehampton Station, Station Road, Okehampton, EX20 1EJ
Treasurer:	christine.horner@talk21.com
Membership & Volunteering:	g.horner936@btinternet.com Geoff Horner, 11 Collatons Walk, Bow, Devon, EX17 6LS
Museum:	museum@dartmoor-railway-association.org
Website:	www.dartmoor-railway-association.org
Facebook:	www.facebook.com/dartmoorrailwayassociation
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