



# The Dartmoor Pony

The Magazine of the  
Dartmoor Railway Association

No.54    Spring 2026    £2.50



**Over the Rainbow**

# The Dartmoor Pony

Issue No. 54

**Editor:** John Caesar

**E-mail:** [museum@dartmoor-railway-association.org](mailto: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](mailto:info@dartmoor-railway-association.org)

**Website:** [www.dartmoor-railway-association.org](http://www.dartmoor-railway-association.org)

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

**X (Twitter):** [x.com/dartmoorrail](https://x.com/dartmoorrail)

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

**FRONT COVER:** Rainbow over Okehampton station on 24<sup>th</sup> January 2026  
(photo: Sue Baxter)

**BACK COVER:** Top: Snow over the station on 3<sup>rd</sup> January 2026. Bottom:  
One of the flower tubs with blue crocuses out on 25<sup>th</sup> February 2026 (photos:  
Sue Baxter).

# CONTENTS

Chairman's Update	Page 4
Notice of 2026 DRA Annual General Meeting	Page 8
Membership & Volunteer News	Page 8
Gerald Smallacombe	Page 11
First Visit to the Interchange Station	Page 13
Puff the Hedgehog	Page 16
Railway 200 Celebration Train at Totnes	Page 19
Around Teignmouth	Page 21
Miah's Diary	Page 23

## **Chairman's Update**

*Sue Baxter*

It is lovely to welcome not one but three volunteers who have joined us this year. Andy Wilson Rudd is actually returning after a long break, asking where his very useful 4-wheel rail trolley lookalike (which he made) is?...safe inside at Meldon. Dave Ovenden has lived in the area, known some of the team for years and been fitting out the model railway. Roy Elliott has been living here a few years, enjoying the Bulleid Buffet breakfasts, rail journeys and the station ambience.

As many of us as possible touch base together most Wednesdays now in a half hour Toolbox Talk at lunchtime. It is proving useful to get to grips with what needs ordering, sharing and discussing ideas, planning ahead and appreciating the progress being made everywhere.

The team made good use of the planned engineering week of 21<sup>st</sup> to 29<sup>th</sup> March, doing minor repairs to walls and then painting part of the Booking Hall, as well as cleaning floors in our leasehold area on Platform 3. The sort of jobs which are easier to do when sadly the buffet is usually closed, and there are many fewer passengers for the rail replacement buses.

Then this summer we will be replacing the paint store on Platform 2 as the roof of the present shed is going to resemble a colander soon. It has lasted 14 years despite being unceremoniously moved by forklift truck from behind the blue insulated fish-van body (a location now covered by the ramp to Platform 3) to Platform 2, and then lowered down over the fence.

Meanwhile there is currently a fortnightly morning working party at Meldon. Under our licence with Network Rail, Meldon Viaduct station platform is being weeded and looking much better. Meldon Aggregates Limited (MAL) has had all the bushes cleared from the area beside it, and the drainage is being sorted. A very different aspect to the one on the two days when we worked up there jointly with GWR and Network Rail parties, before MAL bought the quarry.

The bigger volunteer group has been working in the two sheds. In the Carriage & Wagon shed the area around the Southern brake van is now clear of rubbish and a work area created to start work on completing its refurbishment. The Permanent Way shed has undergone some sorting too.

Restoration of historic artifacts is underway on the Room 2 high worktops. Tea making facilities and chairs have moved to the lighter and airier Room 1 next door on Platform 2. The worktops are high because they were originally built to hold the hot chocolate urns for the Polar Express! They were at the best height for filling the hundreds of mugs. There are also high voltage connections which dealt with demand to boil about 10 large urns at once in the hour or so before the train departed.



*Restoration work underway*

You can see a red paraffin can which is believed to have been used to fill the lamps. The Southern Railway warning sign against trespassers with a fine of 40/-, has come up beautifully. It was a challenge to John

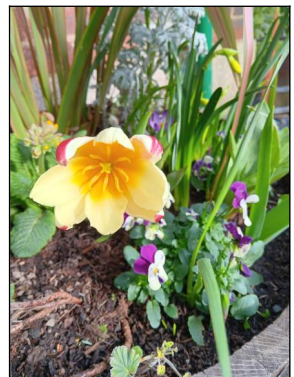
Clark as the lettering is very rough. He achieved a fine white silhouette with a thin artist's brush. Geoff tackled the ticket rack, first treating woodworm, and delicately removing the hand written ticket information, so the sections could be properly cleaned and the cabinet painted. Roy carefully stuck the papers back.

The story of the ticket rack is that it was believed to be in the booking office at Okehampton before the station closed to passengers in 1972. However, the prices for the tickets do not appear to be correct for Okehampton. Richard Burningham, manager of the Devon and Cornwall Rail Partnership, started his career working in several ticket offices and says that Okehampton would have had a much bigger rack because there were so many possible destinations.

With the right 'Guide to Fares' of the time, it would be possible to work out which station it came from, best guess at present being somewhere such as Tresmeer or Egloskerry on the North Cornwall Line. Parking was 1/6d.

Ron recently went on a networking event in Reading hosted by GWR for station volunteers across their region. He was lucky to travel after the long period of closure due to storm and flooding. Network Rail had to deploy sonar equipment at depth to check bridge stanchions where the receding flood revealed scouring above the normal water level. It was clearly a hazardous job, even trying to get unmanned craft into the fast flowing turbid currents.

The flower tubs on Platform 3 have been saved from ignominious decline by Roy. They were giving me a headache as the bands were gradually rusting away and then easing themselves out into the path of passengers. Now they are sporting jazzy little bands bought as a reel, overlapped, cut to size and neatly screwed into the wood which has plenty of life left. All 8 barrels, planted up for the re-opening in 2021 should now have a long life, as intended.



The cycle rack at the front of the station is well used by rail passengers. The new Okehampton Interchange station will have even more provision for cycles and it looks as though it is on target for opening this summer, with 200 car parking spaces. As a stakeholder we are imminently due for an on site meeting.

Graham is drawing up a roster for opening up the Signal Box and running the model railway layout from Easter on a regular basis, with several operatives passed out. So do make the effort to walk to the west end of Platform 3 and you are in for a treat.



Finally, I must introduce three very small supporters, by the names of Lola the pug, Lucy the shih tzu and Angie the bichon frise. All rescue dogs aged about 6 who can't quite let Roy out of their sight, exceptionally well behaved and you see them enjoying the warmth of the staff room. You might meet them anywhere around the station, a clue to where Roy is working!

## **Notice of 2026 DRA Annual General Meeting**

All members are warmly invited to our AGM which will be held at the Ockment Centre, Okehampton, on Wednesday 27<sup>th</sup> 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!

## **Membership & Volunteer News**

*Geoff Horner, Membership Secretary*

The first two months of the year have seen a flood of membership renewals dropping on the doormat or in the inbox. Thank you to all who have done so. If you are among the relatively few who have yet to renew and have received a reminder please do so. We do value your support. We are very pleased to welcome the following new members:

- Rob Jennings of Exmouth
- Andrew & Rosemary Wilson-Rudd from Gunnislake
- Roy & Ruth Elliott of South Tawton
- Dave Ovenden of Winkleigh

Our volunteer teams continue their valuable work around Okehampton station keeping it spit and span. The shop, model railway display and museum are all flourishing under their care. Spring has sprung in the flower tubs and beds bringing a welcome touch of colour to the platforms and the station approach road and parking areas.

The big news for this issue is that we now have an agreement with Meldon Aggregates Ltd for us to resume regular working visits to the rolling stock in the quarry yard and sheds. At the moment we are making fortnightly visits on Wednesdays with the plan to resume the refurbishment work on our Southern Railway brake van as soon as the accumulated rubbish in the sheds has been disposed of and the state of

our tools and equipment assets established after five years lying idle. Progress reports have been and will be regularly posted in the 'Work In Progress' section of our website so that members can keep abreast of developments.



*New DRA volunteer recruitment banner*

## **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 5<sup>th</sup> May 2026
- Wednesday 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2026
- Wednesday 1<sup>st</sup> July 2026
- Wednesday 5<sup>th</sup> August 2026
- Wednesday 2<sup>nd</sup> September 2026
- Wednesday 7<sup>th</sup> October 2026

## **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. 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.

### **Online Fundraising**

Please consider using easyfundraising every time you shop online!

[www.easyfundraising.org.uk/causes/drsa](http://www.easyfundraising.org.uk/causes/drsa)

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

## **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](mailto:info@dartmoor-railway-association.org) if there's anything you are interested in – please don't just turn up at the station unannounced.

## Gerald Smallacombe

We are saddened to learn of the recent death of Gerald Smallacombe. Gerald was an Okehampton-based steam driver who worked on the Dartmoor Railway after retiring from a successful career on the 'big' railway. He drove the last 2 steam engines to operate on the DR, Hunslet 0-6-0ST 'Darfield no 1' (2006-8) and USA tank 30075 (2010).



*Gerald Smallacombe (2nd from right) with former local railwaymen (l to r) Terry Midgley, Leonard Phare, Les Glidden, and Richard Westlake on the occasion of the reopening of the Arthur Westlake Museum on Okehampton Station. (Photographer: Jon Kelsey, date taken: 15/08/2015)*

We are grateful to Richard Westlake for the following appreciation of Gerald:

“I worked with Gerald and he was a fireman to my father [Arthur] at Okehampton. He started on the railway at Okehampton in the early 1950s and soon got a reputation as a first class fireman. I remember my father saying if he was asked to take a really heavy load he would say yes if Gerald was his firemen.”

"I understand they are credited with taking the heaviest load from Plymouth to Okehampton. 19 'Vanfits' with an N class 'Woolworth'. Full regulator all the way according to my father. Gerald was a passed man at Okehampton soon was out driving on many occasions. I fired to Gerald over the North Cornwall line and to Plymouth. The Okehampton shed closed in 1966 and Gerald for a short time went to Southall but like many railwaymen decided to leave the railway. He still kept his railway interest and worked as a driver on the North Yorkshire railway."

We extend our condolences to Gerald's family.

---

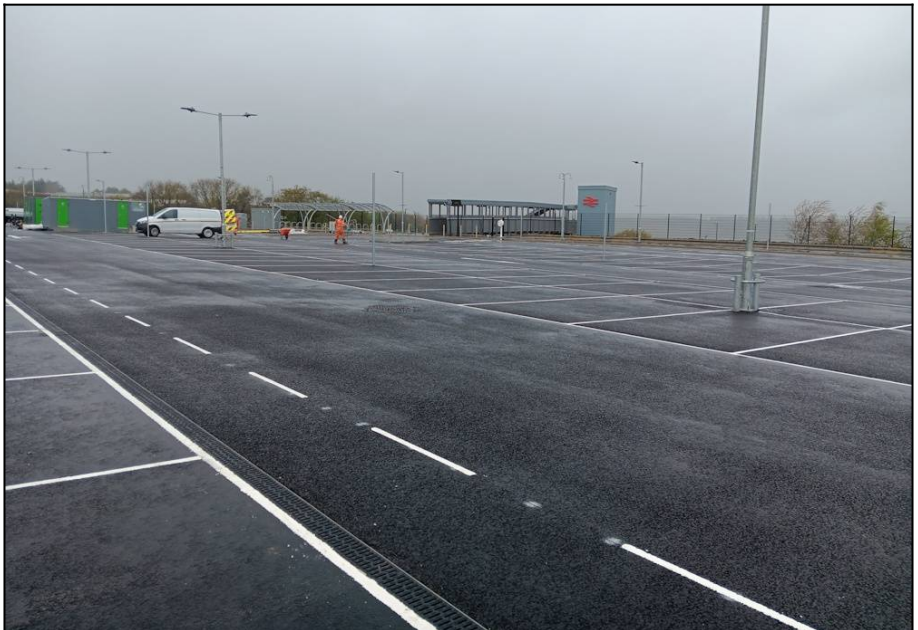


*Meldon Viaduct station has had a recent tidy up. Taken on 13<sup>th</sup> April 2026 after David Naylor and Sue Baxter spent four Wednesday mornings there clearing buddleia, birch seedlings, brambles and gorse. Now it compliments the work done by Meldon Aggregates Limited to clear the bushes from the tracks (photo: Sue Baxter).*

# First Visit to the Interchange Station

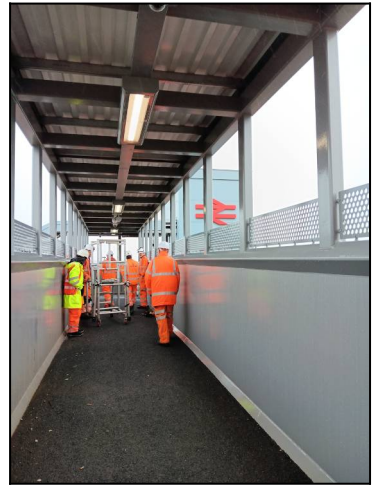
*Sue Baxter*

Our invite for April 15<sup>th</sup> 2026 came from GWR project manager Charlotte Wheaton, to see the new station just after handover from the construction teams. On the day before, it became apparent that it was still a construction site (albeit mostly for cabling as far as I could see, particularly for the electric charging points), so we had to don full PPE (Personal Protective Equipment: safety boots, hi vis trousers, hi vis jackets, gloves, safety helmets and safety goggles). It was also pouring with rain and a westerly wind was blowing.

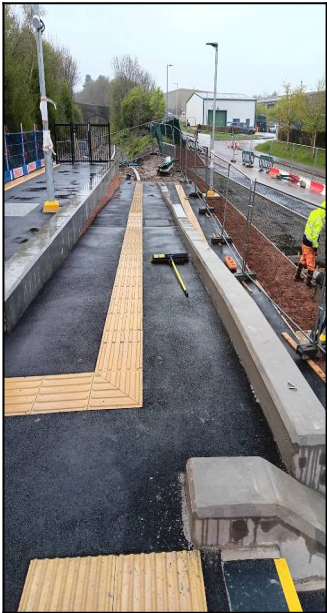


So it was a select party of four who ventured forth under those circumstances. The wide empty car park for 200 vehicles was certainly impressive, with level access across the foot bridge to the platform below. The high bridge sides and roof definitely give some protection from the weather! The lift was getting the finishing touches and the yellow handrails were still covered in protective black foam.

Descending to the platform we gained some shelter from the remaining lineside trees which have not had to be



removed. There are two passenger shelters with narrow seats, at either end of the platform.



Then the steps and two ramps down to the main pedestrian access and bus stop on Hameldon Road. Devon County Council contractors were working there to complete landscaping, which will mostly become dormouse habitat in due course. This is in mitigation for the loss of habitat during the removal of lineside vegetation as the site was widened. It will include one of the fences being covered with wild honeysuckle.

We were looking at the site in particular from the cleaning angle as we are taking on the contract to empty rubbish bins and pick up litter, just as we do at Okehampton Station. We will do this mainly from Okehampton Station, getting the train there and back during the course of a day's volunteering, bringing the bags back with us to the large wheelie bins by the erstwhile turntable, now roundabout.

One of the two bike shelters was in place above and another will go in below. There are eight standard and two disabled electric charging points. Also a few wide spaces which will cost extra to park in. The standard charge will be the same as at Okehampton, £2 a day.



Opportunities for gardening are not yet clear and are on hold. There is no water supply. Another big dormouse habitat area will go in on the bank between the car park and the Forthglade petfood factory above, including shrubs like hazel.



Overall impression: clean lines, clear routes, functional and neat grey metal structures. We in DRA feel we can help make this another great asset for Okehampton.

## Puff the Hedgehog

*Liz Westlake*

A story about a hedgehog named Puff who was rescued from Okehampton station last year.



*Puff after being found*

-----  
16<sup>th</sup> May 2025

A big thank you to the caring and very kind Book Store Volunteers at Okehampton Station who rescued Puff from the track this morning and cared for him until I could collect him. Although weighing 702g Puff isn't very well. He was dehydrated, his left eye is missing (possibly corvids had begun to attack him), he has bleeding from his nose (probably because of the parasite burden he's carrying causing an infection), he had more than his fair share of ticks that had to be removed and he smells strongly of diesel. He also shows signs of severe stress with a good deal of jumping, huffing and hissing. He's now had fluids subcutaneously, an antibiotic injection, both eyes bathed and treated with an antibiotic gel and Profender spot-on treatment for intestinal fluke (parasites).

He is now quietly tucked up in a clean, cosy cage to de-stress and, fingers crossed, start to heal.

Cases such as Puff come in everyday, all need treatment of some sort which is why we are continually fund raising for drugs to treat them with and essential everyday items needed to run the rescue. These amazing little creatures really do need our help.

*Pam (Greatfield Hedgehog Rescue, Okehampton)*

-----

It's been rightly said that rail enthusiasts can be a useful presence on stations, constantly watching out, guaranteed to notice anything "that doesn't look right." And so it was at Okehampton last summer when two watchful buffs actually saved a life! There the poor chap lay, down on the track, trapped between the foot of the platform wall and the nearest rail, looking very careworn and oily, his spikes very mucky.

Spikes?! He was a hedgehog, obviously distressed in a strange world of steel rails, concrete sleepers and stone. No sign of how he got there, although likely he ventured along the line from the Waterloo or Plymouth direction, and very little chance of him getting out by his own brave efforts. So, a life being at stake, with due regard for safety (no trains for half an hour), by reaching down from the platform with a long-handled snow shovel and broom, he helped by becoming a ball and was thus easily scooped up and carefully placed in a suitable container.

From then on, his fortunes could only improve, thanks to specialist care available locally.

*Tony Hill & John Richardson-Dawes*

-----

A typical day volunteering in the DRA bookshop I was asked by Tony if I had a broom or a spade to rescue a hedgehog from the track bed, I also supplied a high sided box to put the hedgehog in. I rang the Greatfield

Hedgehog Rescue in Okehampton and Pam came to collect later that day, she named him Puff.

*Liz Westlake*

-----

25<sup>th</sup> June 2025

Well he's made it!

Puff exploring his new pad at 8:30pm this evening. He's come such along way since his rescue by the volunteers at Okehampton Railway Station. Thank you Emma and family for helping keep him safe. Safe travels Puff.

*Pam*

More information about the work of Greatfield Hedgehog Rescue Okehampton is available on their Facebook page:

<https://www.facebook.com/okehamptonhedgehogrescue/>



*Puff on his release*

## Railway 200 Celebration Train at Totnes

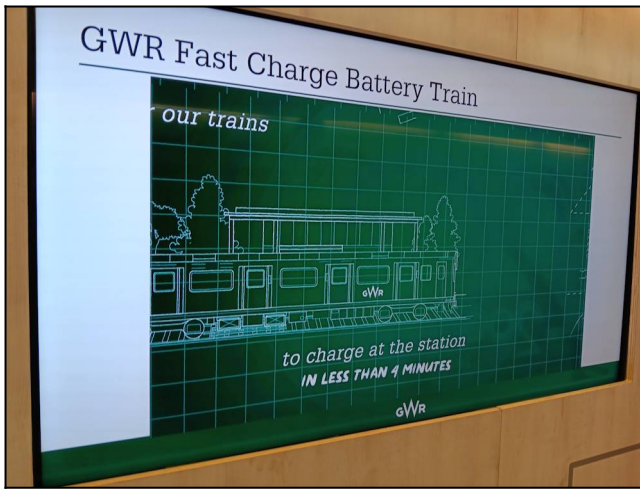
*Sue Baxter*

After all the bus replacements this year due to flooding, it was with relief that on 19<sup>th</sup> March five of us were able to board a train at Okehampton to see the the Rail 200 Celebration Train in the sidings across the River Dart at Totnes. A lovely journey down and walk to Riverside Station in spring sunshine. There we were welcomed aboard by GWR personnel and treated to some history, current challenges and glimpses into the future.

The earliest rails have been found in a mine in Southern Germany, used in the 1500's to move ore tubs with unflanged wheels called hund carts (after the noise they made!). A vertical spike going down between the flat wooden rails guided them.

You can see there was a challenge to demonstrate our bridge building talents. Dai Naylor had constructed a short, slightly dipped bridge across a valley. Our own engineer Graham looked on as a little maid tried to improve it. There was a primary school group on our tails eager to try their hand at signalling, and building a new railway while keeping the costs down!! The (out of favour) Level Crossings were considerably cheaper than Bridges!





In the last carriage a diagram featured a future train taking just 4 minutes to recharge at a station. Reflecting on the number of electrical cabinets and the supply needed for our small station to reopen in 2021, it is interesting to speculate on the future infrastructure

Okehampton would need to provide for green battery-powered trains.

Then it was outside to enjoy the smell of Polish coal coming from 5526 Great Western Prairie Tank and a chance to warm up looking into the firebox with its single layer of chunky coal burning quite cleanly, ready for the return journey to Buckfastleigh.

There was also time for tea and an excellent pasty or chunky sausage roll at the Rare Breeds Centre before strolling back to Totnes station.

A huge contrast in the coastal views on the journey there and back, from high tide in the morning to low tide and a glimpse of quite a few stranded hulks on both the Exe and Teign mudbanks!



## Around Teignmouth



*New and old – GWR IET 802017 heading towards Newton Abbot on 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2026 (top), and later on the same day the Network Rail test train powered by Colas Class 43s 43277 ‘Safety Task Force’ 43257 leading and ‘Bounds Green’ on the rear on it’s return run from Paignton. The train included the Mentor overhead line inspection coach. 1Z18 15:39 Paignton-Westbury Signal W213 via Bristol West Junction (photos: John Caesar).*



*Damage to the wall at Sprey Point, Teignmouth, taken on 26<sup>th</sup> January 2026. (photo: Sue Baxter).*

The sea wall at Sprey Point between Teignmouth and Holcombe suffered significant damage from Storms Ingrid and Chandra in January. A sink hole closed the footpath adjacent to the line. Various parts of the sea wall between Teignmouth and Dawlish Warren were damaged and work is still ongoing on some parts of it.

Network Rail had issued a black alert, its highest warning level, for only the second time since a storm destroyed sections of the track around Dawlish in February 2014.

## **Magazine Contributions Invited**

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

**Deadline for the next issue is 1<sup>st</sup> July 2026.**

## **Miah's Diary – More on Railway Horses**

Do you remember that last time I introduced you to Joey, the warhorse who Michael Morpurgo found?

Well I have been finding out more about horses on our railway. A lady from Exbourne, about 4 miles from Okehampton told how when she was a teenager in 1956 she wanted a horse. She saw an advert in the Western Morning News of a suitable one in Cornwall and her father took her down to see it. She rode it and decided she liked the chestnut mare. A couple of weeks later Ladybird was on the train and Maggie met Ladybird off a wagon at Okehampton Station and rode her all the way home.

I was interested in a horse travelling by train but Maggie was just laughing at her confident young self, riding an almost unknown horse through the town, and country lanes, without batting an eyelid! Well, not quite. Something frightened her when she neared Agistment farm and Ladybird jumped over the hedge! But Maggie did not fall off. She thinks her mother must have had kittens before she arrived home safely! I wonder how many kittens?

I believe horses have to stand all the way in wagons without windows, whereas I lie down under a table, looking for treats or crumbs from anyone.

Last time I also mentioned the shunting horses at Okehampton Station. Well I have learnt a bit more about how they moved the wagons. I always thought that they must have been hitched up in front and walked along between the rails getting grip on the ballast and the sleepers. But when you think about it that would have been very dangerous if a wagon started to run faster.

Apparently the shaft horse was in fact harnessed to the side of a wagon, and the same with the trace horse behind. Then the handlers could quickly release the harness once wagons were moving. Clever shires they learnt to sidestep when they came to crossover points and just kept

pulling. Once unhitched they stood nonchalantly while wagons rolled noisily by to join another train.



They would often weigh under a ton, but move wagons several tons in weight. Two shires once pulled 18 and a half tons together. I can really pull on a lead and have fine muscle form, but their muscles must have been really something and to think they were vegetarians, just ate grass and the odd carrot, no meat at all!

## **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](mailto:christine.horner@talk21.com)



A smoke deflector came detached on the underside of the footbridge in January. Crediton Signal Box was alerted but it had already been reported and drivers were told not to pass the 2-car stop sign. It was later fixed safely back in place so it still tells of the time when steam engines let off smoke and steam which could have damaged the wooden deck of the footbridge. (Photos taken on 24<sup>th</sup> January 2026 by Sue Baxter).



## 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.



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](mailto: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

<b>Enquiries:</b>	<a href="mailto:info@dartmoor-railway-association.org">info@dartmoor-railway-association.org</a> Dartmoor Railway Association, Okehampton Station, Station Road, Okehampton, EX20 1EJ
<b>Treasurer:</b>	<a href="mailto:christine.horner@talk21.com">christine.horner@talk21.com</a>
<b>Membership &amp; Volunteering:</b>	<a href="mailto:g.horner936@btinternet.com">g.horner936@btinternet.com</a> Geoff Horner, 11 Collatons Walk, Bow, Devon, EX17 6LS
<b>Museum:</b>	<a href="mailto:museum@dartmoor-railway-association.org">museum@dartmoor-railway-association.org</a>
<b>Website:</b>	<a href="http://www.dartmoor-railway-association.org">www.dartmoor-railway-association.org</a>
<b>Facebook:</b>	<a href="http://www.facebook.com/dartmoorrailwayassociation">www.facebook.com/dartmoorrailwayassociation</a>
<b>X (Twitter):</b>	<a href="https://x.com/DartmoorRail">x.com/DartmoorRail</a>

