



The Dartmoor Pony

The Magazine of the
Dartmoor Railway Association

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**Okehampton Interchange
Station Opens**

The Dartmoor Pony

Issue No. 55

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

FRONT COVER: Opening of Okehampton Interchange station: left to right: Sir Mel Stride MP, Jo Grew – Route Strategy Director for NR & GWR, Jacqi Hodgson – Devon County Councillor, Mandy Ewings – Leader, West Devon Borough Council, Chris Edmonds – Mayor of West Devon, and Julian Brazil – Leader of Devon County Council. (Photo: Sue Baxter)

BACK COVER: Top: Brunel Bridge from the cab of an HST when video was being shot for driver route learning. (courtesy: David Brailsford).
Bottom: Talyllyn No7 “Tom Rolt” approaching the rear of the train At Abergynolwyn to be recoupled for the return trip to Tywyn Wharf.
(Photo: Chris Brown)

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Chairman's Update

Sue Baxter

The new Okehampton Interchange Station has opened just in time to be included in this issue. The entrance to the 201 space car park is from Exeter road close to the A30. There are 3 ticket machines and the cost remains at £2/day. The covered footbridge and lift provide step free access to the middle of the single platform which also has a covered stairway, ticket machine, Passenger information displays, and shelters. Steps and a ramp lead down to a bus stop and shelter on Hameldown Road.

The timetable has been tweaked to allow for stops in both directions at OKI (Interchange) so the dwell time at OKE (Town) station is a little less. GWR crew have less time to grab and go with sustenance from the Buffet! The Ticketing System is issuing tickets from August 1st.

Meanwhile on Thursday 18th June, Campaign for Better Transport officer Michael Solomon Williams paid us a visit. It was a week in which CBT were celebrating successful re-openings and highlighting them to Press and Government. Michael was very enthusiastic and expressed how important our line is to the work they do to make the case for more re-openings.

“what you do is not just amazing for Okehampton, but offers an outstanding example for the rest of the country, and one which we will go on to use.”

On the Platform 2 bench l to r you can see Matt Barnes, GWR Head of Strategic Development, Gary Shipp, Community Rail Network, Mike Ireland, Okerail, Michael Williams CBT, and, standing, Tom Baxter DRA Secretary.



Needless to say the chance to visit the Model Railway in the Signal Box was not to be missed even though it was a whistle stop, following a delicious snack of canapes made by Leanne's Bulleid Buffet Team, before catching the next Exeter Service.



We have also just received a Stations in Bloom Gold Award for 2025 in person from one of the Judges, Derek Beer who whisked over the footbridge to meet the Wednesday Volunteers before returning on the same train. The award is designed now to reflect the wide effort that is put into all aspects of a station's life. In 2025 we highlighted the opening to the public of the Model Railway.



Twelve Volunteers gained certificates for the 3 Year Emergency First Aid at Work.

A full one day course in June was expertly led for us by Joe Rice at Folly Gate Village Hall, where there was ample room for practical

sessions. Joe tested our existing knowledge of the location of defibrillators, with the nearest to OKE being over the footbridge at the Granite Way Cycles. Plenty of stimulating examples of good practice and thought provoking facts. A thoroughly engaging, useful and confidence building day.

You can see Graham being treated for choking with an abdominal thrust given by Dai. Joe helped to found OKEPADS which is a charity providing and maintaining public access defibrillators and offering a free 2 hour evening workshop in the use of defibs and doing CPR on Friday 2nd October
okepads@gmail.com

As you will see this is the first Pony magazine under the editorship of Chris Brown.

A big thank you must be extended to John Caesar, who is stepping down after many years editing the magazine. He took on the role after Peter Ritchie was no longer able to do it and has kept the Dartmoor Pony coming out with a wide variety of eye catching covers, and different key story themes Out and about himself on the railways he was able to add his own local and further afield photos, expertly captioned. John is the only volunteer to my knowledge, certainly in recent years who has also held down a full time job, (at the Met Office). He continues to be interested in our Museum offering.

Chris Brown has both taken on the editorial mantle of John and is also expanding the amount of archive information, particularly photos at present, which can be shown on a loop on a new screen in Museum Room 2. Selecting and captioning material already scanned by Dai Naylor will take time. But gradually it will enable our Museum to be refreshed regularly this way. A big Welcome Chris.



Chairman's Report **DRA AGM 27th May 2026**

Sue Baxter

Welcome everyone to our 2026 AGM. It is always a pleasure to meet up with members who are able to join our regular volunteers here. It is now four and a half years since our regular service started in November 2021 and twenty nine years since the GWR services restarted on Sundays. Friends volunteers and supporters have been with Okehampton Station and the Dartmoor Line all those years, key to its success.

In particular I would like to welcome new volunteers who have already all made big contributions. Roy Elliott who keenly spots jobs which need doing or could enhance the station.

Dave Ovenden who arrived under the radar with all manner of contributions to the Model Railway from the start. Sue Mitchell who has come with a passion for shopkeeping and Chris Brown who has had his eye on helping out here for sometime before taking the plunge and has now agreed to be our Dartmoor Pony Magazine editor.

This year I thought I would explain some of the on going official work which enables us to carry out our tasks which support the railway.

In order to work as GWR Station Adopters we have to attend a briefing meeting. We were glad one was held again recently to bring 12 members officially into the fold. We call it the pink vest course, our organiser Nicole Black calls it On Boarding! It essentially explains what we are safely officially allowed to do around the station, and definitely not the same as working in our own homes! All aimed at keeping volunteers, the railway and its passengers safe. Interesting to speculate whether we will have a new uniform under GBR.

Our Fire extinguishers are regularly checked and changed as required. We have had our own in house training on handling them.

NR also have clear working arrangements and responsibilities laid out. We get a reminder of these and again we have an in house review of

those in respect of the licensed area which includes the Signal Box, the Bay platform and Meldon Viaduct Station.

Our Employers Insurance has to be kept up to date and the certificate displayed at several locations.

GWR carry out an annual Tenancy Audit of the building area we lease, in respect of such things as the condition of the rooms, PAT testing of electrical equipment, risk assessments and emergency evacuation procedures.

As a volunteer body we need to have qualified First Aiders and a course in June will see 10 members gain a three year certificate.

Working at height on our carriages also requires certification and a few members will go on a qualifying course.

Thanks to a healthy balance sheet we are able to meet the associated costs. This is due in large part to the work of volunteers keeping up with the station cleaning contract, our main source of income, then our shop proceeds, and donations, as well as membership monies.

Maintenance is ongoing around the station. Devon County Council responded quickly when the recently laid heavy anti slip matting on the Footbridge started lifting. We pointed out it was a potential trip hazard. Their contractor came and used extra wider fixings. Our own team are tackling fence posts to keep fencing stable on the DCC side.

Flower and shrub tubs constantly need attention. Three have “gone home” having gently disintegrated despite our best efforts but some 10 have been saved with new metal bands around them. The wood is likely good for another 10 years. The main external basement hatch is now better waterproofed.

There was a stunning garden display this year thanks to Alan French donating a mixture of bulbs, and in particular some magnificent strong red and yellow tulips which stood up against the severe easterly winds which blew through the station.

In the shop a few additions to the range of books and crafts keep appearing. The modellers are keen to add another attraction, a small layout, and this time not just for Christmas. So watch this space. Meanwhile the Signal Box continues to attract visitors to the Model Railway. Recently the lovely detailed coaling stage was spotted by a past Okehampton fireman who actually shovelled coal from it into tenders.

At Meldon we continue to maintain the Viaduct Station Platform, ie by weeding it. There are visits to the shed every month and a plan of work for the Brake van emerging, which has been carefully moved a few feet to a better work position in the Carriage and Wagon shed. There is a new site manager but we are pleased to retain links with two longstanding quarry employees there. We await the triggering of work by Network Rail to reinstate the 2 miles of track.

Okehampton Interchange Station is coming over the horizon. Our first introduction was on the 15th April in a howling gale when 4 of us had a chance to walk round. We have been asked by GWR to do the cleaning there, as we do at Okehampton Station and have agreed to do so on a trial basis.

So we are looking forward to welcoming more volunteers to maintain the high standards that we have set ourselves. A new banner and a new leaflet have been produced. At the weekend Rotary May Fayre in Okehampton we had a stall and sold some shop items and also ex railway signs.

We also sponsored one of the duck races. But with the trickle in the East Okement River it was down to army cadets racing the ducks through water sprays!

DARTMOOR RAILWAY ASSOCIATION

Financial Statement for the year ended 31st March 2026

RECEIPTS AND PAYMENTS ACCOUNT

	Unrestricted Funds	Total for 2025/2026	Total for 2024/2025
RECEIPTS			
Membership	2360.50	2360.50	2586
Donations	7578.76	7578.76	6384
Shop Sales	6243.39	6243.39	6906
Bank Interest	49.91	49.91	19
Museum Donations	64.15	64.15	19
Model Railway Sales	62.00	62.00	0
	16358.71	16358.71	15914

PAYMENTS

Stationery, postage & general printing	348.65	348.65	378
Pony Magazine printing	679.00	679.00	666
Carriage, Wagon and Station refurbishment costs	1617.36	1617.36	483
Shop Stock	5534.15	5534.15	2408
Audit Fee	120.00	120.00	120
Miscellaneous Expenses	3649.10	3649.10	2431
Museum	0.00	0.00	130
Model Railway	317.92	317.92	978
HRA Membership	228.00	228.00	432
Bank Service Charge	98.23	98.23	
	12,592.41	12,592.41	8053
			7861

Excess of receipts over payments 2026	3766.30	3766.30	
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Bank and cash Balances at 1st April 2025	32337.64	32337.64	
Bank and cash Balances at 31st March 2026	36103.94	36103.94	

Membership & Volunteer News

Geoff Horner, Membership Secretary

At the AGM in May I reported that our membership stood at 157, just one less than that reported to the 2025 AGM. This number has now increased to 159 with Chris Brown & Susan Mitchell of Okehampton joining our ranks. Chris has taken on the role of editor of the Dartmoor Pony and member of the Museum/Archive team. Susan (Mitch) has joined the team running the shop. Welcome to you both

We currently have around 25 regular volunteers (16% of our membership) who have continued their work keeping the station looking clean and well cared for, the floral displays blooming, the museum informative, the shop welcoming a steady stream of customers and the model railway attracting a good number of visitors.

Regular volunteer visits' to the workshop and yard at Meldon quarry are continuing. Work on our SR brake van (LDS55625) has now reached the stage where primer coats are being applied. Although built by BR in 1948 the van is of Southern Railway design and we are now at the stage where we need to decide on the livery the van is to be finished in. Southern Railway is one choice. If any members have a suggestion on this please drop us an email to info@dartmoor-railway-association.org with the subject line SR Van

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 5th August 2026
- Wednesday 2nd September 2026
- Wednesday 7th October 2026
- Wednesday 4th November 2026
- Wednesday 2nd December 2026

George Thompson

Dave Ovenden

Many thanks to David Brailsford who visited the Museum on a recent Wednesday volunteer day along with his wife Claire..

After their Museum visit they stopped by our door and during conversation they told us that Claire's father, George Thompson had been a District Inspector at Okehampton during the 1970s.



He asked if we would like his stamp for the museum, which we gladly accepted and he also said that he had a number of documents at home regarding carriage and wagon maintenance at Okehampton, which he has since supplied to us.

George had started with Southern Railway as a 'Box Boy' and made his way up to relief signalman. During World War 2, he had been blown off his bike by bomb blast on more than one occasion whilst on his way to work. Over the following years he had made his way up through the grades, finishing as a District Inspector at Okehampton until made redundant.



George Thompson in Streatham Junction Signal Box 1940

Arrival of the 175

Dave Ellis

The inaugural class 175 at Okehampton arrived as scheduled at 00:12 on 30th May 2026 consisting of 175001 at the front and 175006 at the rear working 3Z20 22:56 Exeter St. David's to Okehampton.



GWR staff promptly disembarked and conducted platform-train interface kinematic envelope measurements and portable disabled access ramp inclinometer measurements at each door.

Driver and guard swapped ends and the train departed on schedule at 00:22 for the return to Exeter.



Talyllyn Railway

Chris Brown



Talyllyn No7 "Tom Rolt" at Tywyn Wharf (Photo: Sue Mitchell)

Mitch and I had a booking for 10th June 2026 to ride on the Talyllyn Railway based in Tywyn, Gwynedd, West Wales.

This former slate railway, with the unusual gauge of 2ft 3in, runs from Tywyn Wharf, alongside the mainline, up to Nant Gwernol, just short of

the disused quarry at Bryn Eglwys that it was built to serve. Rising some 200 feet over a distance of 7.25 miles, the steepest section is the last part from Abergynolwyn to Nant Gwernol which rises 38 feet in three-quarters of a mile.

The train was pulled by the 0-4-2 tank engine “Tom Rolt” constructed in the railway’s Pendre workshops in 1991 and named after L.T.C. Rolt, one of the founder members of the Talyllyn Railway Preservation Society who had previously been one of the pioneers of leisure cruising and was instrumental in the restoration of the British canal system.

The permanent way leaves Tywyn Wharf and shortly passes through Pendre station where several of the railway workers were enjoying a tea break in the sun. Passing through request stop halts at Hendy, Fach Goch and Cynfal, which all serve farms of the same names, the line reaches the station at Rhydyronen. This was built to serve a nearby small slate quarry and manganese mine but is now also a request stop. The views of the Afon Fathew (Matthew River) valley are spectacular from this section of the railway.

The route then passes through the request stop at Tynllwynhen halt, which also serves a farm of that name, and on to the station at Brynglas which has a passing loop and a siding for engineering trains. This station serves the hamlet of Pandy and also served the disused Cwm-Pandy slate quarry.

The railway crosses the Dolgoch gorge before reaching the next station at Dolgoch which allows visitors to walk down to the Dol Goch falls. A TV crew at this station was recording material for the Welsh language children’s programme, Dreigiau Cadi (Cadi’s Dragons) which is set around the Talyllyn Railway.

Passing through the request stop Quarry Sidings halt, which also has another passing loop the railway reaches the former limit of passenger services at Abergynolwyn before travelling on to the current terminus at Nant Gwernol just below the disused Bryn Eglwys slate quarry.

The train then reverses back to Abergynolwyn where it stops for about 30 minutes so that passengers can stretch their legs and visit the refreshment kiosk.



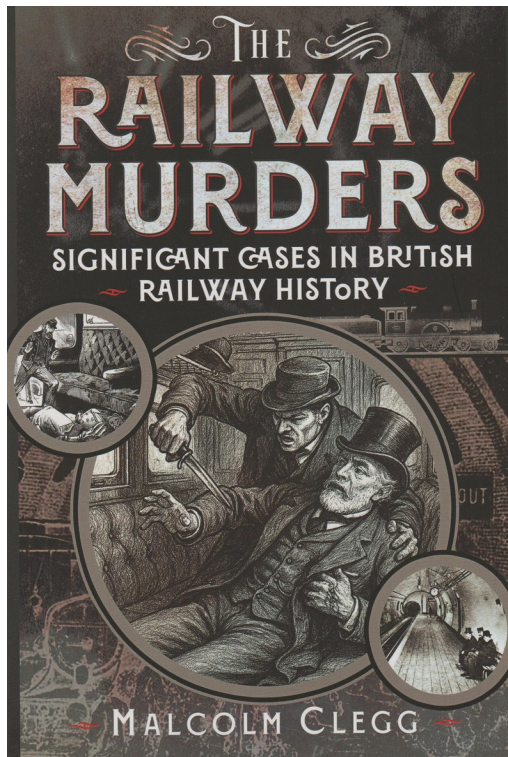
Coupling up at Abergynolwyn for the return trip. (Photo: Chris Brown)

At this point the engine is uncoupled and sent down a passing loop to be recoupled to the rear of the train for the journey back to Towyn. Inevitably, the return journey is faster than the outward leg and another train hauled by the railway's No.1 "Talyllyn" Loco was pulled into a siding to let us past. The TV crew were still at Dolgoch, filming at another location in the woods above the station. Passing through Pendre, there were again some of the workers enjoying their lunch in sun. Presumably, they hadn't been there since our outward trip. And so back to Tywyn Wharf where there is an excellent narrow gauge museum with a reconstruction of part of the study of the Reverend W Awdry whose Thomas the Tank Engine stories were inspired by, and set around, The Talyllyn Railway.

Book Review

Dana Wiffen

THE RAILWAY MURDERS



Significant Cases in British History

By: Malcolm Clegg RRP: £25

192 Pages/Hardback Size: 24 x 16cm

This is a railway book with a difference including numerous cases of murders/attempted murders from the early days of railway development right up to the 21st Century. Author Malcolm Clegg worked as a Constable with British Transport police for 30 years, when he retired he became an active member of the British Transport Police History Group

which enabled him to use their archives to carry out extensive research for his book. He has written 6 books altogether two of which are The Last Days of British Steam and LMS & LNER Steam Locomotives.

There are 8 chapters starting from the pre-passenger early days which includes the first railway murder in 1840, which was a murder of a railway worker on the outskirts of Glasgow, to the attempted murder of a Special Constable in Preston in 2024. Chapters covering early, mid and late 19th & 20th while the 21st Century is covered in the final chapter of 24 pages and there is also a chapter covering the IRA murder and terror campaigns of 1939/40 & 1969-1997.

The gruesome subject matter includes the macabre contents of a pine box, a Station Master shot by a Porter, murder on the Brighton line, a woman's body found in a railway tunnel, a Polish Countess stabbed on the Underground and a University Student killed in a drunken argument. These are just a few examples of those included in this book that may appear numerous but as the period covered is almost 200 years and while crime on the railways today is numerous it is perhaps not as bad as it seems in proportion to the number of travellers across the UK.

Readers of murder mystery books will enjoy the wide variety of crimes detailed and will not want to put it down, while Railway & Social History enthusiasts will enjoy reading the book while checking to see if they recognise the crime locations, perhaps even something that occurred at their local station. Some will be surprised to see that those convicted of murder in early Victorian times were executed in public.

There are a few photos and sketches of victims and of some of the assailants in court and this adds to this book's Victorian feel along with the front cover design. This is an eye opening, blood curdling and well researched read which will be enjoyed by many.

Heritage Buses visit Okehampton Station

Graham Peacock

Visitors to Okehampton Station may have felt that they had stepped back in time on Saturday 20 June, when a series of nine heritage buses called at the station forecourt over a period of a couple of hours around lunchtime.



Photo: Graham Peacock

The buses belong to members of the Thames Valley and Great Western Omnibus Trust, and were taking part in the 'Royal Blue Coach Run'. This is a three day tour taking in Basingstoke, Weymouth, Taunton, Bude, Barnstaple, Minehead and Yeovil, and retraces many of the routes formerly served by Royal Blue Coach Services. These vehicles were a familiar sight around the West Country until 1986, when they were incorporated into 'National Express' and the Royal Blue livery was dropped.



Photo: Graham Peacock

Hopefully we will see these magnificent vehicles at the station again. Further information about this heritage group can be found at 'www.tvagwot.org.uk'.

Museum News

Chris Brown

As part of an ongoing project to reorganise and update the Museum, the association has purchased a new TV to allow slide shows to be displayed more easily.

In addition, a new software program will allow easier creation of slide shows and will record and organise the large number of documents and photos that the association has. This software will also allow for easier searching of the archives and will be able to record the physical location of items in the association's collection.

News from ‘The Bookstall’

Chris Horner,

At our popular new/pre-loved railway book and gift shop on platform 3 at Okehampton station we are holding a Summer Sale of our new railway books with discounts across the whole collection. Among the authors are Maurice Dart, Bernard Mills, Colin C Maggs, Hector Maxwell and numerous others whose subjects focus on the Southern Railway/Region and the West Country.



If you can, please visit the shop, Wednesdays, Fridays, Saturdays, Sundays from open from 10.30 to 15.30 A full list of books is available on the our website www.dartmoor-railway-association.org and follow through ‘About’ then ‘DRA Shop’. For mail order enquiries please send an email to info@dartmoor-railway-association.org

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: magazine@dartmoor-railway-association.org

Deadline for the next issue is 1st November 2026.

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.

Online Fundraising

Please consider using easyfundraising every time you shop online!

www.easyfundraising.org.uk/causes/drso

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

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

Miah's Diary Railway Care for Creatures.

I would like to draw your attention to the way certain livestock have had special care on the railways, which leads me to think that we canines could expect more.

First you see 6 feathered friends, pigeons in an airy wicker basket, on the platform scales at Toddington on the Gloucester and Warwickshire Railway. All the railway staff were told to look after them as per these instructions.

GREAT WESTERN RAILWAY

OFFICE OF SUPERINTENDENT OF THE LINE

Paddington Station

April 1st 1890

Circular No 776

CONVEYANCE OF HOMING PIGEONS

Special care must be taken in handling hampers and baskets containing Homing Pigeons sent by rail for liberation at Stations. These packages must not be tilted, and so placed in the vans as will allow of the birds obtaining as much air as practicable.

Station Masters to whom Pigeons for Liberation are consigned must see that the birds are liberated clear of buildings and telegraph wires.

In the event of several consignments of Pigeons arriving at a station at the same time from different directions care must be

taken that they are not liberated simultaneously, but that one set of birds are out of sight before another is liberated. Advise all concerned and acknowledge receipt to your Divisional Superintendent.



Homing Pigeons in basket, Toddington (Photo: Sue Baxter)

In the second instance you see that a cow could have travelled in its own wagon, as shown in the excellent Train Story museum at Haven Street on the Isle of Wight Steam Railway. I like a good view around on my journeys and I think she has a 360 view, with fresh air. Much better than being on the floor of an air conditioned carriage with sealed windows when the electrics have failed and sticky passengers are dripping sweat onto me. Although it is well flavoured with salt and I like licking their bare legs, even when they wince.



Cow in wagon at Haven Street, Isle of Wight Steam Railway. (Photo: 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.



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: Geoff Horner

Committee Members:

Ron Kirby, Liz Westlake, Ged Kirby

Dartmoor Railway Association Contacts

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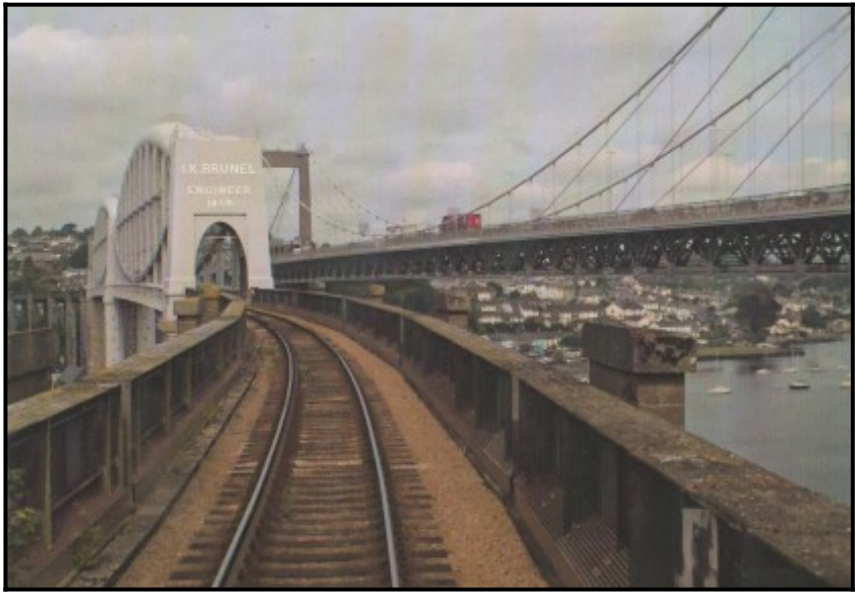
Volunteering: Geoff Horner, 11 Collatons Walk, Bow,
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Facebook: www.facebook.com/dartmoorrailwayassociation

X (Twitter): x.com/DartmoorRail



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