



# THE DARTMOOR PONY

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Supporters' Association**

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**The Royal Oke**

# The DARTMOOR PONY

Issue No. 28

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## DARTMOOR RAILWAY SUPPORTERS' ASSOCIATION

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

**FRONT COVER:** The Royal Oke HST special from Okehampton to London Paddington on Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> March 2017. Here, power car 43188 waits to lead the train towards Exeter. *Photo: Philip Wagstaff.*

**BACK COVER:** Top: The rail grinder at Okehampton, pending departure on 13<sup>th</sup> May 2017 *Photo: John Caesar.* Bottom: 20205 and 20189 preparing to haul away 33035, 47828 and 45060 to the Severn Valley Railway via Bristol, on 24<sup>th</sup> April 2017 *Photo: Paul Martin.*

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## **Notes from the Chairman**

*Rev. Philip Wagstaff*

As we move into summer the Sunday trains to Exeter have begun again and the Thumper unit is now being used on the heritage trains running from Okehampton to Meldon Viaduct which are supported by DRSA volunteers. Please look at the website for more details.

On the 19<sup>th</sup> May the Annual General Meeting took place at the Ockment Centre which included a report on the work that your committee had done during the year and gave time for a conversation together. The members of the committee standing for re-election were re-elected at the meeting and we will continue to work on your behalf. If there is any matter that you would like to raise with the committee during the year please get in touch. All of our members are important to us and we as a committee want to reflect your concerns as well as celebrate the good work that takes place at the railway.

We are now beginning our summer season when we will welcome visitors who will be able to look around the station, visit the shop and museum, take refreshment in the buffet and take a train ride to Meldon. At the moment, the motive power is the Thumper unit which has had ongoing maintenance by Julian Pope and the team and once some issues had been resolved the unit is now back in operation. Thanks are due to Julian and to all involved.

In terms of main line trains, the Polar Express locomotives left last month hauled by two class 20's and in March OkeRail with the support of GWR, Dartmoor Railway and Okehampton United Charity ran the Royal Oke with an HST set coming to Okehampton. Two reports of the excursion are to be found later in the Pony.

The committee met after the AGM and we were able to co-opt a new member. Tom Baxter has now joined, in addition to his work on the Station Maintenance Team. We welcome Tom and look forward to his contribution to the work of the committee.

DRSA seeks to support the railway by providing volunteers who give their time and skills to developing the railway. Thank you to all those

who give of their time as volunteers and thank you all for your membership and support for DRSA and the railway.

Last month we said goodbye to Peter Flick who was one of our long-standing committee members – a tribute is to be found in this edition.

Again, thank you for your support for DRSA and the Dartmoor Railway.

## **Railway News**

### ***Withered Arm DVD***

We are pleased to report that sales of the DRSA “Withered Arm” DVD have exceeded all expectations and necessitated an order for additional copies from the South West Film and Television Archive (SWFTA). Many thanks to all those who have purchased copies and supported our fundraising efforts – also for the positive comments received from a number of members.

Copies are still available and can be purchased from the DRSA shop at Okehampton station at week-ends, or by post by contacting David Clegg: [clegg.lethbridge@tiscali.co.uk](mailto:clegg.lethbridge@tiscali.co.uk) or at 01626 867210.

### ***Exmouth to Barnstaple - Driver's Eye View DVD***

Okehampton also features in a newly released DVD called “*Devon Branches: Exmouth to Barnstaple - Driver's Eye View*” available from Videoscene. This was filmed during 2016 and follows a 143 unit on its journey from Exmouth to Barnstaple. Whilst this doesn’t include cab footage from the Dartmoor Railway, a brief interlude on the Tarka Line section shows Okehampton station.

### ***Missing Book...***

DRSA has begun to compile a small reference library of books related to railways in the region, particularly the ‘Withered Arm’ and the Southern Railway in the southwest. However, we seem to be missing our copy of *The Okehampton Line*, by Nicholas and Reeves (Irwell Press). If anyone has borrowed it, or can give us information about its location, please get in touch.

## **Membership Matters**

Following the sad death of Peter Flick, Geoff Horner has taken over his role of Membership Secretary. As yet we have not been able to access Peter's computerised membership records, and we have had to use other sources to compile a current membership list, which may contain errors as a result. If anyone thinks they have been overlooked, please contact Geoff.

We are pleased to have had several new members join us since the last edition of the 'Pony' was published:

- Adrian Noyes from Yeoford
- Steven England from Okehampton
- Bill Woolley & Mandy Stephenson from Leicester

A very warm welcome to all. Members publicising the Association and the Dartmoor Railway is a way of helping our numbers to grow. Application forms for new members can be downloaded from the website. For membership queries please contact Geoff Horner, Tel No. 01363 82383 or e-mail [g.horner936@btinternet.com](mailto:g.horner936@btinternet.com)

## **Events**

The regular DRSA social gatherings are open to all members. Note the change of venue for the first Wednesday meetings, previously at the Kings Arms in Tedburn, now across the road at the Red Lion.

**First Wednesday of the month from 18:30 onwards:**

The Red Lion, Tedburn St Mary, EX6 6EQ

**Third Thursday of the month from 18:30 onwards:**

Fox & Hounds Hotel, Bridestowe, EX20 4HF

**Peter Flick**  
**19<sup>th</sup> May 1932 – 3<sup>rd</sup> May 2017**



Peter has been part of DRSA for as long as I can remember. Every member of DRSA brings their own unique character to the organisation which is what makes DRSA happen. You knew when Peter was around though and his unique take on life and railways was always appreciated.

Many of us were able to be present at Peter's thanksgiving service at St Andrews Church in South Tawton on the 30<sup>th</sup> May. It was a time of remembrance and thanksgiving while at the same time being a time of sadness and reflection. Peter, being Peter, allowed us to laugh and although the occasion was fitting it was not solemn. Peter had a zest

for life and that wasn't going to stop him letting us know it through the instructions that he had left as to how the service should proceed!

We learnt much about Peter's life which showed the variety and experiences that he shared with his family and friends. He was affectionately known as Biggles – as much for his exploits and 'daring do' as anything else! He had served with the REME in Suez as part of his national service. He has been in his time a car salesman with Lotus being part of the mix. But his involvement has always been wider than his work. He was involved in many community groups and that involvement reads like a 'who's who' in the locality. He has been a parish clerk, supported many groups locally and his involvement has always been given willingly and in Peter's inimitable style. As we heard at the service Peter's philosophy was that he 'may be getting older but he refuses to grow up'.

Peter was a great supporter of DRSA. As a member of the DRSA committee Peter shared his long experience with us. While I was secretary he always gently pointed out my grammatical errors and the fact that (being a Midlander) I spelt Bulleid at least three different ways in the minutes! As Membership Secretary he was a first point of contact for many people and he was gracious in carrying out his duties which would often take many hours, especially at the start of the new membership year and when he publicised events across the membership.

He was always generous of spirit and, as was remarked on Tuesday, his laugh went before him. He was one of life's characters and it was good that our paths crossed over the last 10 years or so as part of the Friends of Dartmoor Railway and later DRSA.

We will miss Peter and send our condolences to his family and friends.

*Rev. Philip Wagstaff*



## **DRSA Annual General Meeting Report**

*Jon Kelsey*

The 2017 AGM took place on Friday May 19<sup>th</sup> at the Ockment Centre, Okehampton. Attendance was poor, an all-time low of just 19, although it was heartening to see a new member, Adrian Noyes, amongst the usual suspects.

Perhaps the low turnout reflects the recent gradual decline in membership, or the depressing state of the railway, though we might console ourselves with the theory that more members would turn up if they had more reason to complain about DRSA.

All the usual AGM annual reports were delivered, describing another year of good financial performance, non-existent progress by the railway, and sterling efforts in often adverse conditions by our volunteers. The previous committee was re-elected *en bloc*, with the sad omission of Peter Flick, whose recent death cast a shadow over the meeting. A new membership secretary will be appointed at the next committee meeting.

Member Paul Mercer, ever keen to improve the benefits of DRSA membership, outlined a proposal to put on screenings of railway videos and DVDs. To circumvent broadcast restrictions it would have to be for members only. It will be interesting to see how this idea develops.

Following the AGM, the attendees were treated to a screening of '*The Withered Arm and other lines in South West England*', the new DVD produced by DRSA in association with the South West Film & Television Archive, and largely the brainchild of Dave Clegg.

# **Rail Operations & Line Update**

*Paul Martin, Duty Manager*

## **Line Update**

The remedial work on the downhill curve on the approach to Meldon was completed, eradicating that problem. Ongoing work has seen some spot sleeper replacement, fishplate oiling, annual weedkilling and packing of ballast.

In May we had a brand new rail grinder visiting the railway. This 4-car beast will be Network Rail (NR) owned once all acceptance issues are sorted.



*31452 departing for Chaddesden Sidings, Derby, with the rail grinder in tow on Saturday 13<sup>th</sup> May 2017 (John Caesar).*

In the meantime it was getting its grinding hours up on the full length of our railway. This enhances our track and certainly turned some heads of visitors in its very shiny yellow livery. Anybody lucky enough to go on board saw a state of the art rail vehicle a long way from the heritage stock we use or even the visiting GWR trains. It was brought to the railway and taken away by DCR's stalwart 31452, now

the last Class 31 operating on the main rail network which was something of a contrast to the grinder. Once accepted by NR the grinder can travel at up to 70 mph on the network.

### **Heritage Services**

A late development with the Thumper meant we could start heritage services on May 27th, despite a false start when we had a delay by 1 week due to an electrical fault. Trains are running between Okehampton and Meldon on Saturdays, Sundays and Bank Holidays.



*Thumper 1132 and a 150 unit, in GWR green at Okehampton on Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> May 2017 (Paul Martin).*

### **Sunday trains to Exeter**

No longer called the “Sunday Rover”, as the bus across the moor no longer runs (though it did not last year either), the GWR trains between Okehampton and Exeter started on Sunday May 21<sup>st</sup> and will run on Sundays until September 17<sup>th</sup>. So far, the service has been formed of two-car class 150 units and has been well patronised.

## Traction Update

**1132 (Thumper Unit):** After a number of test runs 1132 was deemed fit for service and, after a number of years out of use, is now back running our heritage services. Julian spent lots of time making it possible and C&W carried out a last minute clean and tidy up. It is planned for 1132 to have a full overhaul and repaint at the end of heritage services.

**08937:** 'Bluebell Mel' is currently still awaiting full repair and overhaul. It is presently restricted to light shunting duties at Meldon. It is still planned that it will be fully operational later in the season.



*47828 in its new Intercity livery (Paul Martin).*

**47828:** D05 Preservation's Class 47 left the railway along with the other two Polar Express locos in May. The impressive sight of a pair of Class 20s doing the honours and the 5 loco convoy left for Bristol St Philips Marsh for tyre turning before going on to the Severn Valley Railway for their gala. 47828 was out-shopped in Inter-City Swallow livery before the gala, looking very impressive and getting lots of positive feedback. It is now at Great Central Railway (North) for their gala and it's planned to have other gala appearances over the summer.



*20205 and 20189 passing Crediton on 24<sup>th</sup> April 2017 with the Polar Express traction, 33035, 47828 and 45060, en route for St Philip's Marsh (Jon Kelsey).*

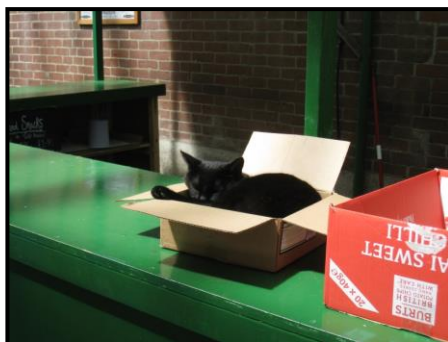
**Visiting Locomotives:** 45060 and 33035 owned by Pioneer Diesel group left the railway with 47828. As mentioned 31452, 20189 and 20205 have all visited the railway to move traction on or off the railway.

## **Rolling Stock**

Eventually, all of Peter Spokes' class 423 4-VOP electrical multiple unit carriages have left the railway, having been stored at Meldon for some years

## **A message from Percy**

I'm still here at Okehampton. Quite often sitting in a box whilst the world goes by. I've been exploring on both Thumper and GWR trains but not ventured on a trip yet. I'm still happy to be the centre of attention and meet lots of people. I've got big plans for my anniversary of arriving at the railway. My Facebook page will have all the details.







*Class 37, 37688, has recently been acquired by D05 Preservation and made its first official outing in preservation on the Mid-Norfolk Railway over their Spring Diesel weekend. It is pictured here on May 1<sup>st</sup> 2017 at Dereham station (John Caesar).*

## **DRSA Shop**

*Christine Horner*

The shop is becoming really popular with visitors. As well as selling second hand books, DVDs and videos we have a range of new railway gifts and souvenirs.

For our younger visitors, we have been selling donated "Thomas" books and trains. We are now really in need of more items for children. So if you are clearing out children's toys, books, etc. (not necessarily train items) we would love to have them. Please bring them along to the shop any weekend in the summer from 11am to 3pm.

Donations of railway books, model railway items, paperbacks and hardback books, railway DVDs and videos are still also very welcome. Please contact Christine for further details on [christine.horner@talk21.com](mailto:christine.horner@talk21.com)

And, as a regular reminder, you can raise money for DRSA when you shop online via our [easyfundraising](https://www.easyfundraising.org.uk/causes/drsa) page:

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

## **Volunteer Activities**

*Geoff Horner, Volunteer Coordinator*

Dartmoor Railway is still keen to recruit a number of DRSA members to the role of Travelling Ticket Inspector in order to free up the guards on the heritage train services from this responsibility. No previous experience is necessary and on the job training will be given.

If you are interested in this, or any other volunteer activity, please contact Geoff on [geoff.horner936@btinternet.com](mailto:geoff.horner936@btinternet.com), 01363 82383 or 07769 736536

## **Carriage & Wagon Team Report**

*Geoff Horner*

Since my report in the last edition of the 'Pony' the Carriage & Wagon team have continued their work on the 'FK' carriage and the LMS Goods Brake Van.

The 'FK' carriage has had the first top coat of mid Brunswick green applied and a start has been made on rubbing down ready for the application of the second top coat. At the same time the underframe, bogies, etc. have been cleaned and given a fresh coat of black. Internally we have taken up the well-worn carpet in the corridor and are in the process of replacing it with heavy duty non-slip vinyl

flooring. This will not only make cleaning easier but should also have a much longer life.



The LMS goods brake van has had further areas of rotten wood side-boards replaced, an area of flooring in the cabin similarly treated and the area around the internal stove renovated. All

the new wood used is treated and given a coat of preservative and primer and the whole van has been given a coat of grey undercoat. The first coat of the new bauxite brown livery has been applied to one side and one end with the remaining side and end following on. The whole van will then be given a second coat of bauxite brown.

The DR ‘Thumper’ DEMU unit 1132 had spent many months of standing idle and neglected in all weathers in the Meldon yard. The sudden late decision to use it to operate this year’s heritage services between Okehampton and Meldon Viaduct meant a hectic two week period getting it up to as reasonable standard of cleanliness as possible

With no loco hauled heritage trains at present we have taken the opportunity to deal with the ‘weeping’ bottom of the oil tank beneath Lab 11 that houses the fuel for the diesel engine that powers the generator. The tank has been removed and has gone away to a local engineering firm where it is having the old porous bottom cut off and a new one welded on together with new internal baffles and drain tap. The oil supply lines will also be replaced.

With the onset of the better weather, work on our SR goods brake van has recommenced. The problem with the axle boxes has been resolved and replacement brake shoes have been sourced and fitted so the van is once again properly mobile. The stripping of the considerable amount



of rotten timber has commenced and we hope to have the fitting of new timbers well underway by the end of the summer. Progress can be followed at: <http://www.dartmoor-railway-sa.org/lds55625>



## **Station Maintenance Team Report – May 2017**

*Tom Baxter*

Looking through the last report I see it started with how we had restored the station after Polar Express and this again has been very much the format for this year. All the barrows, sack trucks, Post Office barrow, planters etc. had to make their regular migration off the under-canopy section of platform 3. Most to platform 2 via a ‘special possession’ to get them over the track safely. How we envy our BR era colleagues who had the luxury of not one, but two barrow crossings, one at either end of the station. In this risk averse railway age we are not even allowed one. It seems, given the relatively light train service nowadays, progress is not always in a forwards direction.

With everything having made its way back to platform 3 after Polar, the station took back its SR 1950s ambience and we got stuck into the serious task of maintaining, and this year even increasing, its ‘green’ credentials. Late last year we took delivery of four platform seats now surplus to requirements on the West Somerset Railway. These are ex-SR seats believed to be originally from the Barnstaple to Ilfracombe



line. In fact Tony Hill remembers a number in store at Barnstaple Junction following the closure of the line to Ilfracombe and WSR buying some of these off BR. So we believe these will be some of those. The wheel having turned full circle and them now back on another surviving part of the Withered

Arm. On the WSR they were placed at Stogumber and Dunster stations where they acquired the ubiquitous GWR brown livery. So, at the very least, they needed a repaint into SR green. Three are now done, with one, the ex Dunster candidate, yet to do. This has additionally required some TLC on its woodwork, in the form of a replacement seat slat and wooden feet manufactured by Jon Kelsey. During the interim we left it

on platform 2 with its Dunster name still showing which caused a few ribald comments. Although we don't think anyone really believed they had just arrived at Dunster station.

Another paint job undertaken at the start of the year was the Booking Hall. Once it was released from its Polar Express wrapping it was realised that its paintwork was beginning to look quite tired. So we set to and repainted it and also reorganised the various poster and notice boards for good measure. Hopefully these are now better organised with less confusion for those seeking information. The railway stuff relating to train times etc. is on the booking office side with other information on the former model shop side. The intention being to keep the Booking Office window clear for those wishing to purchase tickets.

Other tasks have been many and varied. A troublesome leak in the new booking on point roof (and Percy's Restaurant) has defied a cure for a while but we are now hopeful the worst is over with John Coxon and David Bell having chased down the various leak points. This is the lean-to building attached to the footbridge stairs plinth on platform 3. In a former life we believe it was the station's lamp room where the various signal and other oil lamps were serviced and refilled. The major breakthrough on the leak front was fixing and cementing back the flashing which had been disturbed by the installation of various security camera cables in the recent past.

Vegetation has required 'attention' in the platform 2 car park and we are very grateful to new volunteer Greg Bennett for dealing with that after first getting the grotty job of removing accumulated rubbish from the same location. There is a management issue to be addressed in this car park with various 'free loaders' having moved in and seemingly seeing it as an extension of their own private parking space. A taxi firm being amongst them. We assume the rubbish arrives with or via them. Hopefully the railway or the landlord can sort out this issue before it becomes a much worse problem.

Other painting jobs have included the front windows and doors on the main station building and other seat and fence repainting. Geoff Brooks and Greg have been the 'front of house' painters. A C&W colleague Alan has recently started his own one man 'Sunday Gang'. Whilst his wife Maureen is managing the shop he sets forth paint brush in hand. Mainly painting SR green so far but shortly to paint Bamboo or SR Dark Stone to give it its correct title. David Bell has continued his repointing of the footbridge brickwork. A steady job requiring raking out of the old mortar and new mortar pointed in. Something you do a bit at a time to prevent madness or despair setting in. But we are most grateful he is willing to undertake this extensive task and continue with it.

As a team we average about five or six regulars with others who turn out on a more occasional basis. Generally we work Saturdays which seems the most convenient day for the majority. But as you can see there is flexibility with the new 'Sunday Gang' and there are also some 'homework opportunities'. One recent example being a chance to rebuild Meldon Viaduct. Not the real one but a model one that was constructed by Mike Ellis for the former model railway located at Meldon. Sadly it had to be removed when the model railway building was required for other purposes. Mike had intended to rebuild it as a static exhibit for the museum. He did make a start with it but unfortunately ill health means he cannot now carry on. It is a bit of a kit of parts at the moment but if anyone were interested we would welcome their help. Very much a homework project for someone with a model railway construction inclination.

Again, grateful thanks to our stalwarts who continue to support the 'Team'. Work would not get done without them and, as always, any others who would like to join us are very welcome. Relatively straightforward DIY skills are all that are needed although extra skills and knowledge would be most appreciated. We even have our own tea brewing and meal room area on platform 2 complete with a railway book and film library next door.

# **Horticultural News**

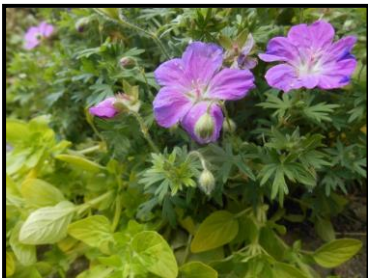
*Sue Baxter*

Corncockles and Hollyhocks!

We hope you will soon be enjoying these. They are certainly some of our favourites, so we have spread them about this year. Corncockles self-seeded successfully in the wildflower patch, but we have also popped one against a stanchion, under the canopy, so more people can see a beauty which used to be commonplace in our cornfields.

Unfortunately we are not going to have as many cornfield poppies as we had hoped. They were coming along nicely in all sorts of 'wasteland' places where they had self-seeded, (carefully weeded crevices), mostly by brick walls with the best display to be around the signal box. However, our Duty Manager (keen gardener) was not on duty the day when the Permanent Way Gang wielded their herbicide spray lance. Shriveled?! - they did!!!

The grit boxes on Platform 2 have been relieved of their 20-year old dark green conifers – largely because they were covering up the running in board, OKEHAMPTON sign. Greg took over with loppers and a handsaw when my chainsaw balked at the multiple stems and dense nest of needles. For dwarf conifers, their volume and weight was impressive so it was lucky that we could get a trailer alongside on the former goods siding near the surviving overhead wagon gauge. We have chosen to have conifers with lighter foliage all the year round. Two particularly slow growing ones have gone back in, *chamaecyparis lawsoniana Aurea Densa*. As elsewhere in tubs, we are attempting to enhance the dwarfing characteristics by planting them in sunken pots.



We are hoping to bring on some other plants with light green or golden foliage to fill gaps in flowering time. One pot on Platform 2 has our favourite golden oregano, now setting off a brilliant, dainty pink alpine geranium (left). Happy Gardening!

## **Brake Down**

*Paul van der Linden*

Work continues towards the restoration of DRSA's BR Southern Brake Van LDS55625. Two brake shoes were missing from the brake van, and the sourced replacements had a different size fitting. To make them fit, the mounting holes



needed to be enlarged on both brake shoes by about quarter of an inch in diameter. John Coxon and I took one each to some tame engineers we know to get the work done. Unfortunately, when "my" brake shoe came back the hole was still too small, so the shoe didn't fit. The easy solution was for me to open it out a tad on my milling machine.



The picture is of a brake shoe on my milling machine just after the pivot hole was enlarged to take the two inch mounting pin. The large silver cylinder is the chuck, and the black cylinder below it is the boring head with the tungsten tipped cutting tool projecting vertically down from it. The tool tip is nearly

touching the hole which is surrounded by chips of cast iron swarf. A cutting speed of about 600 rpm was used with relatively deep cuts at each pass – cast iron is not difficult to cut and you can see the shiny silver of the fresh cut in the middle of the block. If the cutting speed is too high it can generate heat which hardens the iron (not good) and if the cutting depth is too small the tool tip will skip or jump (also not good).

Hopefully the shoes should be fitted back on the brake van very soon.

## **'Royal Oke' charter train to London - Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> March 2017**

*Tony Hill*

This special 'Inter City 125' 8 coach HST; 0750 from Okehampton to Paddington and 1812 return was organised by the Devon County Council initiated OkeRail Forum and underwritten by Okehampton United Charities.



The principal objectives for the running of this train were to give publicity and backing to the ongoing campaign to restore a regular passenger service between Okehampton and Exeter, which was withdrawn in 1972.

GWR, after the initial approach from OkeRail back in 2016, were quickly able to confirm the availability and hire costs of an HST set (some are scheduled to be spare on winter Saturdays) and Network Rail subsequently soon arranged a path for the train; which incidentally, and credit to them, never needed to be altered.

On the 'great' day the train, the first HST on the line for many years, left Okehampton with about 500 passengers; mainly from Okehampton, West Devon and North Cornwall (even including a special bus from Bude), excitedly looking forward to a day out with a difference by train.

It was unexpectedly not long before, due the poor adhesion on the rusty damp rails and an alleged wheel slip protection problem on the ex Doncaster works rear power car, that the train came to an abrupt halt at Bow. After the travelling fitter attended, the train ran at reduced speed to St David's (picking up a few more passengers at Crediton), where on arrival, about 50 mins. late, it was arranged by GW Swindon Control for all passengers to transfer to another HST. This should have

worked a Paignton to Paddington service whose passengers were directed to other services and with little overall delay to their journeys. The transfer of passengers, staff and refreshment stores to the replacement HST at the adjacent platform 5 was all conducted most efficiently in just 12 minutes, and the train was off on an exceptionally good run to Paddington where arrival was only about half an hour late at 1130.

On arrival at Paddington the train's main organisers and Central Devon MP Mel Stride, who travelled on the train, were met by Under Secretary of State Paul Maynard MP, who did not fail to appreciate the strength of public feeling from England's largest 'Rail Desert'.

Passengers spent the day in London visiting museums, theatres, shops, restaurants, London Eye, relatives & friends or just sightseeing etc.

The return run from Paddington was problem free with an arrival at Okehampton within 5 minutes of its scheduled arrival at 2120. The passengers on the outward journey took the change of trains at St David's in good humour and they all enjoyed their day out by train to London, many asking when is the next one?!

Special mention must be made of the extra efforts made by GWR management & staff and also the OkeRail officials on the train, to do everything possible to try and ensure everyone had a great day out.

Also to the Dartmoor Railway permanent way staff who, under the overall direction of Charlie White, the new DR Operations & Safety Manager, worked very long hours hand sanding the steeper gradient parts of the Okehampton line. DRSA volunteers assisted ably with publicity, car parking, buffet and excellent station presentation at Okehampton.

Overall the day was a great success that made a worthwhile profit too. We now look forward to the next through train to London planned for later in the year.

## **The Royal Oke – view from the train**

*John Wills*

I arrived at Okehampton station quite early, not wanting to miss the arrival of Great Western Railways HST set, as this is perhaps only the second time that one has visited the Meldon branch. The previous occasion was an HST tour from Plymouth, visiting Okehampton and Meldon via Newton Abbot and Heathfield, on the Moretonhampstead branch. The driver on that occasion was Richard Westlake, the son of Arthur, after whom our museum is named.

Back to the Royal Oke and the arrival time which came and passed with no sign of the train. The weather was heavy rain resulting in very wet (and no doubt slippery) rail conditions. When the train finally arrived, 15 minutes late, it caused much excitement among the 500 or so passengers waiting on the platform. Others were vying to get the best vantage point for a good photo in the poor lighting conditions. I was personally delighted that GWR had provided one of its newly liveried sets for this momentous trip to London. Rumours around the station, as we were boarding, confirmed that 'slipping' was the cause of the late arrival at Okehampton. We were urged to take our seats as quickly as possible, to ensure a 'right time' departure. This was made more difficult by all the coaches not being platformed. However, we still left at 0753, only 3 minutes late. The journey started well until we came to a stand at the out of use Bow station where we were told that members of the train crew were checking the rear power car for wheel flats. (These are caused when the driver applies the brakes and the wheels lock due to the railhead conditions). We eventually left Bow with authority to travel as far as Exeter at a maximum speed of 35mph.

By the time we arrived at Exeter St David's, we had been informed by the train manager that due to the wheel flats on our train, it would have to be taken out of service and it had been arranged for us to change trains. I have to pay great credit to GWR for arranging this at short notice. Our replacement train (which I later found out to be the cancelled Paignton service) arrived on platform 5 very soon after our arrival at platform 6. This platforming made it easy for the passengers



to change trains only having to walk across the island platform (more praise for FGW).

We eventually left Exeter at 0934 (54 minutes late). The remainder of the journey to London Paddington was uneventful with the exception of more hospitality and apologies from FGW by offering free biscuits with any drinks bought from the somewhat smaller buffet than on the original set. We were travelling from Okehampton to London Paddington as an unadvertised express with head code 1Z18 which meant that there were no station stops after Exeter and we arrived at Paddington at 1136, only 38 minutes late. Whilst the representatives of OkeRail met some dignitaries on the platform at Paddington, I headed off to enjoy over 6 hours in the capital.

I was back at London Paddington in plenty of time to see our empty coaching stock arrive at platform 9 from Old Oak Common ready to form the 1812 departure from London Paddington to Okehampton. I remained glued to the departure board in the main concourse, desperately hoping that our train would be shown on the display (which would have made a brilliant photo) but sadly it was not to be. Instead the train was announced over the station public address system. Safely on board, in my reserved seat, we left Paddington at 1812, 'right time'.

It has to be said that the GWR train crew were brilliant, many of them having volunteered for duty on this special service, and for the rail enthusiasts, like myself, I was delighted to be offered one of the surplus window stickers, as a souvenir of the trip. I'm not sure that there will be many London Paddington to Okehampton, via Exeter St Davids and Crediton, posters around!

The timing of our return trip was exemplary, running several minutes early in places. Four minutes early at Exeter St David's, one minute early at Crediton where it seemed strange to witness the single line token being handed to the driver of a High Speed Train, by the signaller. Our final arrival at platform 3 at Okehampton was at 2117 only 4 minutes late. No doubt caused by the still slippery rails.

I felt very privileged to travel on this special train and am grateful to all those who made it possible. I hope it's not the last. With my limited knowledge of railways, especially the permanent way, I'm sure that regular use of the line from Crediton would solve the problem of wheel slipping and subsequent wheel flats.

## **OkeRail Forum Update**

*Sue Baxter and Tony Hill - DRSA delegates to OkeRail Forum*

The Devon County Council (DCC) initiated OkeRail forum, set up in late 2015 with the objective of restoring a regular passenger train service between Okehampton and Exeter, continues to have regular meetings in Okehampton chaired by local Councillor Mike Davies of Okehampton.

It is succeeding in getting our cause out into the open, not least by the publicity around the Royal Oke train. A delegation was met at Paddington by Rail Minister Paul Maynard. Since then Chris Grayling, Transport Secretary, has indicated publicly that there will be a trial service.

At the latest meeting on 11<sup>th</sup> May, DCC reported some progress, not least that design work is now in hand for the single platform Okehampton Parkway station. Hopefully a planning submission will be made in 6 to 9 months time. Meanwhile some levelling of the land for the associated car park has started on the one and a half hectare site. This has come about as spoil is being moved from the upper part of the Okehampton Business Park, where it is located.

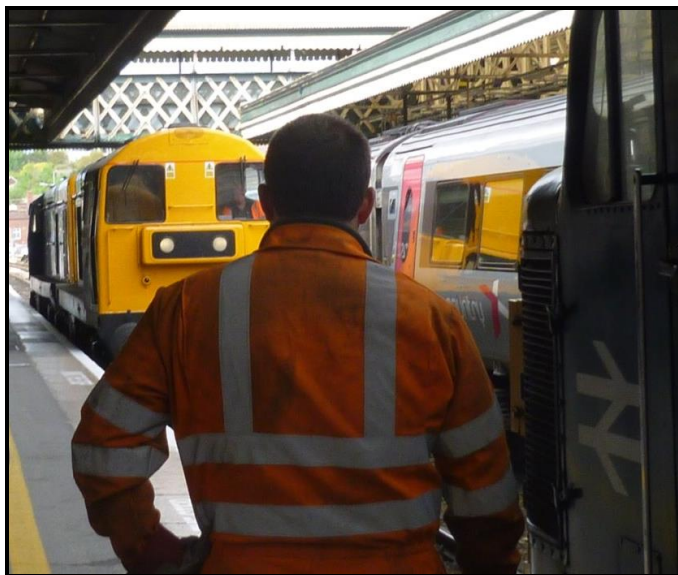
Progress is also being made by Dartmoor Railway in identifying the signalling alterations required. This includes the need (highlighted by GWR), for the Global System for Mobile communications - Railways (GSM-R) as used on Network Rail for Driver-Signaller communications. A very significant cost will be incurred for the associated radio masts and wiring etc.

It is unlikely any trial train service will start before end of 2018 (partly due to lack of rolling stock). The trial could be for 2-3 years duration, as done elsewhere.

Interestingly DCC advised that their subsidy to GWR for operation of this summer's Sunday Okehampton passenger service was a substantial five-figure sum.

As mentioned elsewhere in this magazine OkeRail is planning a further special train from Okehampton to London later in the year.

Overall there was a very positive feel to the meeting, due to the progress made and planned.



*Platform 5 at Exeter St Davids on 24<sup>th</sup> April 2017. The Polar Express locos, and the hauling Class 20s under the watchful eyes of Julian Pope (Dave Clegg).*

## **Rosie's Diary - some answers and more questions**

*By Rosie*

Were you right? Jon Kelsey was the first with an eager reply. My last diary had pictures of the Hythe Pier Railway, on the south side of Southampton Water. It was very busy that day because there was a footie home game in the city. To the south is Hythe Spartina Marsh Wildlife reserve where birds thrive on fish hiding in the salt creeks. I was allowed in the reserve, but once binoculars went up, my tail and bottom went down. You should hurry along and visit because the railway is in its 100<sup>th</sup> year. It has had a tough time. Recently the linking ferry got hooked up on the pier head landing stage so that it now looks drunken. It has been hit amidships by a dredger too. However, a bit like our Greenslade Bridge (which seems to attract the attention of oversized lorries), it is a survivor.

Back at base we had the Royal Oke. When I heard that a Royal Train was arriving I expected to be putting on my hi vis and meeting the corgis. Instead I was confined to the staff room, apparently unable to assist with reverse parking of about 110 cars. Jon Kelsey and Geoff Brooks did stand a better chance



of being seen in the mirrors through the pouring rain. Nevertheless I emerged onto the platform for the formal paw waving send off one has to give to ones fans. (The least I can do to keep sausage, bacon, pasties and sandwiches coming my way!).

After the departure, I could sense a certain atmosphere, but couldn't put my claw on why that was. After the 5am start I was looking forward to relaxing over bacon butties. It was especially evident that our man in the box (signal) was not himself. He was joined by the bearded two legs and there was much muttering about sand, buckets of sand and even miles of sand. Everyone did get their normal colour

back when a man from another box (Crediton) said he had seen our train.

We returned home so I could snooze on my sheep's wool fleece. We were finally stood down from an early evening sanding job on the incline from Fatherford to the station which has our ruling gradient of 1 in 77. (The Dawlish route to Plymouth has the much steeper ruling gradient of 1 in 35 so I am sure the driver was glad to come to us instead that day!).

In the evening my natural white coat was helpful in the darkness. Alongside my 2 legs I pointed out hidden steps to returning travellers, as they plunged out of the brightly lit platform to darkness at the front of the station. It was lovely to welcome home over 500 such happy passengers.

Now it is time to mention Meldon where we again were very pleased to meet and greet friends from a previous visit by the Railway Ramblers. We showed them the viaduct again. They were held up a little so you can see I had time to check out for any unannounced immigrants hiding by the quarry entrance. I really put the wind up them and (I am told) that they didn't hop but definitely ran from their bunkers. Jon Kelsey



pointed out unkindly (and surely wrongly) that I was about 2 minutes late in changing my chase. At least I had a go when I got the scent. How 2 legs can scent anything from the top of the security poles they put around the quarry I have no idea.

Tess's 2-legged pet Mavis was refreshing a tub recently on Platform 3 when a new 4-legged friend came into view. She was a brightly patterned common lizard making

the most of a beautiful sunny day. She sunbathed on the fencing for quite a while and posed for photos by several of our visitors. I just hope she gets on as well as I do with Percy!



Now for the mystery railway in this quarter's Pony Magazine. You notice I have photographed a rare example of British mixed gauge track. There was high quality fencing alongside and a water tower so they can run steam. We walked to a major structure nearby and learnt about the chief engineer there. He landed his job years ago after demonstrating at the start of his interview that he could not only walk up the chains to the top but also down again, in the days before safety harnesses. If I had seen him I would have barked frantically to tell him not to do what I wouldn't do! Who will be the first to guess the railway name correctly?



## **Committee of the Dartmoor Railway Supporters' Association**

**Chairman:** Philip Wagstaff

**Vice-Chairman:** Sue Baxter

**Secretary:** Jon Kelsey

**Treasurer:** Christine Horner

**Membership Secretary & Volunteer Coordinator:**

Geoff Horner

**Committee Members:**

Tom Baxter, Dave Clegg, Tony Hill, Peter Ritchie

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