



# THE DARTMOOR PONY

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Supporters' Association**

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**Class 31 Weekend**

# The DARTMOOR PONY

Issue No. 31

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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:** Class 31, 31452, in siding 12 at Meldon Quarry during the Class 31 weekend, on Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> January 2018. *Photo: David Hunt.*

**BACK COVER:** Top: 31452 at Okehampton on the evening of 20<sup>th</sup> January 2018. *Photo: David Hunt.* Bottom: Rail grinder at Okehampton on 6<sup>th</sup> January 2018. *Photo: David Hunt.*

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## **Notes from the Chairman**

*Rev. Philip Wagstaff*

Since the last edition of the Pony the railway has run two successful events, the ‘Train to Christmas Town’ event in the weeks before Christmas and the Class 31 weekend. Both events brought people to the railway and both events were well received by the public who attended. Thanks are offered to all concerned for their hard work in the running of these events.

DRSA volunteers were there supporting these events and are involved in the railway in different ways throughout the year. Some at ‘front of house’ and others are ‘behind the scenes’ but all of our volunteers are valued and are vital in the support that DRSA gives to the staff at the railway.

As we look to the emerging springtime we look towards the new running season. Details of events and running times will be available on the DRSA website when they are known, which, together with the Facebook page gives information about the railway in general as well as specific DRSA activities and events.

DRSA has been supporting the railway for many years now and as with any organisation it is important to have a periodic review of what we do. The DRSA committee have been looking at ways that we can support the railway in the future. This is an ongoing conversation but if you have any thoughts on how DRSA may go forwards could you please let us know either by post to the station or via the link on the website. The committee’s reflections will be part of our conversation at the 2018 AGM.

Every member is a valuable part of the association as a volunteer or as a supporter. Thank you for your ongoing support for the railway through your membership of DRSA in 2018.

## **Membership Matters**

*Geoff Horner, Membership Secretary*

Thank you to all who have renewed their membership for 2018 and a very grateful thanks to all those who added a donation to their membership fee.

Since the last edition of the 'Dartmoor Pony' we are pleased to welcome the following new members:

- Stephen Brown & Wendy Burton of Okehampton
- Paul Vodden of Sandford
- Mr Rolf & Mrs Patricia Buerger of Okehampton

## **2018 Annual General Meeting**

The 2018 Annual General Meeting will take place on May 12th at the Ockment Centre, Okehampton. Nominations for election to the committee must be received in writing by the secretary (contact details on page 27) by April 29th.

## **Events**

Keep up to date at <http://www.dartmoor-railway-sa.org/events>

**DRSA Socials (East)** – 7<sup>th</sup> March, 4<sup>th</sup> April, 2<sup>nd</sup> May, 6<sup>th</sup> June, 4<sup>th</sup> July. From 18:30, on the first Wednesday of the month. For all DRSA members, volunteers and DR staff. *Red Lion*, Tedburn St Mary, Exeter, EX6 6EQ.

**DRSA Socials (West)** – 15<sup>th</sup> March, 19<sup>th</sup> April, 17<sup>th</sup> May, 21<sup>st</sup> June, 19<sup>th</sup> July. From 18:30, on the third Thursday of the month. For all DRSA members, volunteers and DR staff. *Fox and Hounds* at Shortacombe near Lydford on the A386 Okehampton to Tavistock road.

### **Royal Oke – Special Train to Oxford and Stratford upon Avon**

OkeRail has given advance notification of the first 'Royal Oke' special train from Okehampton to Oxford and Stratford upon Avon via Crediton and Exeter St David's. This train is being run for the local community in the Okehampton area and other towns and villages which would benefit from the reopening of the line. The train will leave at approximately 7.00 am giving between 5 to 6 hours in the respective destinations, arriving back in Okehampton about 9.00pm. The date is yet to be finalized but is likely to be toward the end of April. Stock will be an HST with Pullman dining and buffet facilities. Online 'airline' style booking will be available nearer the time. Expressions of interest from local residents can be sent to [cldr.kevin.ball@gmail.com](mailto:cldr.kevin.ball@gmail.com) or [mireland501@gmail.com](mailto:mireland501@gmail.com).

### **MG Car Club Atlantic Coast Express – 20<sup>th</sup> May 2018**

The Devon and Cornwall Centre of the MG Car Club will be starting its annual Atlantic Coast Express run from Okehampton station. We don't have full details yet, but there are usually about 50 cars, leaving at intervals during the morning. For further info:

<http://www.mgcc.co.uk/devon-cornwall-centre/>

### **Dartmoor Resonance Music Festival – 16<sup>th</sup>-24<sup>th</sup> June 2018**

Our good friends at the Dartmoor Society are hosting the Dartmoor Resonance Music Festival in June, at various venues around the moor. We were pleased to make a small donation towards the event. More details at the festival website:

[https://www.dartmoorsociety.com/dartmoor\\_resonance\\_music\\_festival](https://www.dartmoorsociety.com/dartmoor_resonance_music_festival)

### **Classic Trucks – Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> October 2018**

Some of you may have seen last year's Classic Truck Run, particularly as it paused at Crediton Station tea rooms. Following the sad closure of the tea rooms in December, the 2018 run will instead be calling at Okehampton Station on the morning of Sunday October 14<sup>th</sup>. There will be a train to Meldon, available to the public as well. More details to follow.

## **Caption Competition Results**

*Geoff Horner, Membership Secretary*

Although there were a disappointingly few entries to the Caption Competition in the previous edition, we did receive some for the judging panel to consider. The winning entry came from David Lindsay (0422):



*“New delivery from Homebase – a flat pack brake van kit!”*

Thankyou David! The £20 John Lewis voucher has been posted to you. Thanks also to those who entered. We will try another competition in a future issue of the ‘Pony’ so better luck next time.

## **Rail Operations & Line Update**

*Paul Martin, Duty Manager*

### **Line Update**

With all the work required to get the Christmas train event up and running, most of the work on the line was ensuring that the road into siding 12 at Meldon Quarry was able to accommodate the train safely. There are some new stop signs currently being installed in the Meldon area which will be visible once the line reverts to its normal two sections - it is presently working as one long section to enable the Christmas train to run.

### **Train to Christmas Town**

The new event went well with positive feedback from virtually all customers. Numbers were down on the previous year but this was partly due to tickets going on sale so late. 31452, the last Class 31 running on the mainline, arrived at the railway to provide traction. Talk of another Class 31 coming came to nothing and this left 31452 as the main traction and the only supplier of train heat. There were no traction problems throughout the event apart from on the last day when the exhaust of the Rocket generator car set alight and flames appeared. Once the fire was extinguished the train ran without Rocket running

until later in the day when it was put back into use. Future plans for 31452 are not known at the time of writing.

### **Class 31 weekend – 20/21 January 2018**

With only one visiting locomotive this winter, rather than the three that came last year, a smaller event was run this year with 31452 operating three trips each day from Okehampton to the Network Rail boundary at Coleford Junction. In addition there was one trip each day into siding 12 at Meldon Quarry utilising track seldom used by any passenger train. Unfortunately the plan to attach 08937 for the Meldon trips were scrapped when it was deemed unfit to run. Despite dreadful weather there was still a decent turnout for both days and hopefully some visitors will come back for the heritage services. DRSA volunteers again turned out in large numbers to provide the train crew, stewards, buffet staff and a presence round the station.

### **Heritage Services 2018**

These are planned to start on Good Friday, March 30<sup>th</sup>, and then run on Saturdays, Sundays and Bank Holidays until the end of September. The timetable will be on the DRSA website as soon as it is agreed. The services will initially be hauled by 08937 until Thumper is back in service. Then both can be utilised at different times. We also have a number of vehicles we can use with the 08. If 31452 remains at Okehampton then it may see some running days as well.

### **Traction Update**

**08937:** With the non-appearance of a second locomotive for the Christmas train, 08937 was promoted from back up locomotive to the loco on the Meldon end of the train every night. It performed admirably throughout with no problems. Once the Christmas train was finished, 08937 was used for shunting at Okehampton station. Unfortunately, in January, when RMS Locotec were working on it, they found a fault with the distributor which impacted on its braking capability and it had to be withdrawn from the Class 31 running weekend at short notice. Parts were ordered and it should be up and running again now. It is planned to use 08937 from March 30<sup>th</sup> onwards for the heritage service.



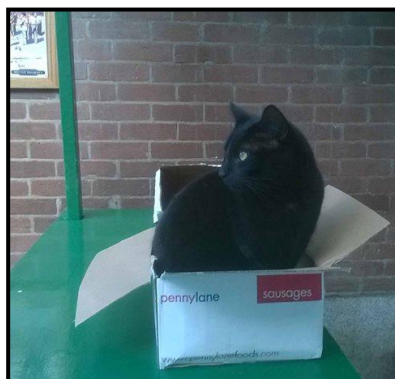
**1132 (Thumper Unit):** One car of 1132 is in the shed at Meldon being worked on by the Carriage & Wagon Team and Julian Pope. Once this is complete the other car will be moved from the siding at Okehampton station into the shed. It is hoped to have 1132 ready to use on the heritage service by some point in May or June. It will be great to see it looking smart after it was pressed into service very late on last year.

### Visiting Locomotives

Class 50, 50008 '*Thunderer*' (on hire to Loram), made two more visits to Dartmoor Railway in January 2018, this time bringing the 7-car rail grinder and collecting it seven days later. The grinding train worked on various sections of the line as well as providing training for COLAS staff who will work on it once it's accepted onto the mainline.

### *A message from Percy*

*Well I survived the Christmas experience - even when Rocket appeared to be on fire in front of my signal box, I took it all in my stride! I got to meet lots of new people and make new friends. I have to say I'm looking forward to warmer weather and the return of the GPO trolley so I can get back to my favourite viewing position on Platform 3. In the meantime, I've been pitching in and helping out.*



*DRSA tell me they are going to print some more Percy postcards as we've sold out of the first lot!! As always, my Facebook page will have all the details.....*

## **Volunteer Coordinator Report**

*Geoff Horner*

As mentioned elsewhere in the magazine the railway held a successful 'Class 31' event over the weekend of 20/21 January with a good number of our volunteers turning out to help on the trains, in the ticket office, in the buffet and in our shop. Thank you to all those who got involved.

## **Carriage & Wagon Team**

*Geoff Horner*

The main focus of C&W work now and for the next few months is the repainting of the railway's DEMU 'Thumper' unit 1132. At present the driving trailer is in the shed and work on this has proceeded at a steady pace. One side has been rubbed down with some filling and sanding where necessary and has received its coat of grey undercoat. Similar work has now started on the second side and both ends. The roof has also been cleaned off and repainted. The painting of the bogies and under frame has commenced as has the freshening up of the interior paintwork.

Work has also continued on the Association's ex SR brake van with the old timber flooring to the cabin and verandas removed, the laborious task of chipping off the rust to the floor deck and coating it in protective red oxide finished and the new timber flooring in place. Much of the remaining side timbers have had the old paint removed and the work of cutting and fitting the new timbers is underway.

The Lab11 generator oil tank has now been repaired and will be refitted and commissioned as soon as the Dartmoor weather has a spell suitable for crawling around underneath a railway carriage.

The interior of our ex LMS brake van has now been completely repainted. Some recently discovered possibly unsound original timber floor boards on one of the end verandas has been cut out and replaced.

## **Station Maintenance Team**

*Tom Baxter*

The team gave some assistance in December with the new Santa event – The Train to Christmas Town. Although it was also noted a number of DRSA owned items of equipment and tools were ‘borrowed’ during its course. So we demonstrated our usefulness in more ways than one. Fortunately our gear came back intact although the Flower Fairies can tell a somewhat different tale!

At the start of January it was time to restore the various items that had been stored in the platform 2 rooms during the event. These have now all been returned to their normal resting places on platform 3. It gave an opportunity to give items such as sack trucks a quick brush over and oil up. We also assisted with various carriage related items and preparation before the January Class 31 Gala weekend. In this we assisted our C&W colleagues some of whom are also SMT members. So at times it is a little difficult to define who did what in an SMT report. The gala weekend also saw some of us helping on the trains. Assistance was also given with a Duty Manager related reorganisation in the Ferry Van involving large barrels of oil. However the nett result of all this activity is that the station looks neat and tidy and ready for the resumption of train services.

We’ve also undertaken more work on the Museum rooms in preparation for their reopening during the season to come. Some wall repairs are currently ongoing where damp is a continuing problem around the chimney areas in both rooms. We are also helping in some work on the displays.

Finally, it is very good news to report the arrival of two new members into the team. Steve Brown and Paul Vodden. A warm welcome to them from all of us and we look forward to an interesting year at the station and elsewhere on DR.

## **Gardening – *Flower Fairies Reveal Lost Statue***

*Sue Baxter*

Penny looked over the fence, pensively, chatting to the Station Maintenance Team. “I joined up to help with the wildflower gardening” she said. They were lined up watching the felling of a 20 year old conifer. Sadly it was overgrowing both the bus turning bay and the graded footpath. Definitely no longer the dwarf conifer that might once have been appropriate in the bed between footpath and road. No sign either of the heathers which once grew there. However we can look forward to mauve mallow flowers appearing in the summer now, wild flowers that have hung onto the edge here by stretching out across the path to avoid the shade.



So – the Flower Fairies were taking it down. In 3 trips the branches were taken to the recycling depot for shredding, (keeping our carbon footprint as low as possible). A lovely lighter conifer now has space to show its drooping branches. It was a challenging day in the persistent cold and rain, but you can see young Fluffy kept warm and assisted all day.



The statue we have revealed is called “Waiting for the Train” and is placed looking down the track towards Exeter. The reappearance of the family group is timely as

people in Okehampton look forward to the planned reinstatement of a daily service to Exeter. It was carved from railway sleepers by John Butler in 1995 and commissioned by Devon County Council and Torridge District Council for Bideford (closed) Heritage Station. Almost immediately it suffered vandalism and was gratefully accepted for resiting at Okehampton Station. Unfortunately, the heads of the father and mother soon disappeared. However, a child continues to sit on her mother’s knee, with a dog on one side and a suitcase the other. *A restoration project for someone?*

## **Arthur Westlake Museum**

*John Caesar*

Following the annual museum hibernation during the Christmas Train season, we have been removing the stored station trolleys and luggage from the museum and trying to spruce things up before the heritage trains start again.



Thanks to new Station Maintenance Team volunteer Steve Brown, we now have an impressive 'Crediton' station sign mounted on the wall. This joins the 'Goods Office' sign which originally came from

Okehampton. We extend our thanks to Tim Miles who has loaned these signs for display in the museum.

Another exciting addition to the museum is a model of Meldon Viaduct. Some of you may remember this being part of the Okehampton OO gauge model railway layout in the building next to the Meldon buffet carriage. Originally built by Mike Ellis, the model has recently been refurbished by another volunteer and converted for display as a stand-alone exhibit in the museum.



Finally, we are planning to install a donated PC and monitor in the museum to allow visitors to browse our growing collection of digitised photographs. Unfortunately, the screen appears to have died, so if anyone happens to have an old (preferably flat screen) computer monitor laying around unused then please get in touch at [museum@dartmoor-railway-sa.org](mailto:museum@dartmoor-railway-sa.org) or speak to one of the volunteers at the station.

## **GWR Consultation**

*D.P. Clegg*

The national press has had much to report on rail development proposals lately. Of particular interest to us is the Department for Transport's (DfT) consultation document on the GWR franchise which raises the proposal to split the GWR franchise into two separate franchises. Under the proposal the South West of England services from Paddington (and relevant branch lines) would be separated from the London to South Wales and Thames Valley services.

DRSA will be responding to the consultation document as an interested partner and our relevant community interest. What is particularly good to note in the consultation document is the interest shown by DfT in the re-introduction of all year services between Okehampton and Exeter, though it has to be noted that even though the track is in situ, substantial funding still has to be found for improvements to signalling etc. to allow a regular service to run. Mention is also made of the Devon County Council aim to re-open the disused SR route between Bere Alston and Tavistock, which would enhance the argument for eventual reinstatement of the full SR route between Exeter and Plymouth.

### **DRSA Shop**

#### **Platform 2**

We welcome donations of railway books, railway miscellanea, model railway items, paperbacks and hardback books, railway DVDs and videos.

Contact Christine Horner for further details:

[christine.horner@talk21.com](mailto:christine.horner@talk21.com)

## **OkeRail Forum**

*Sue Baxter*

A draft of a report, commissioned by Devon County Council, was presented by their consultants Jacobs considering the state of the line and various design options for Okehampton Parkway Station. It is due out in full by the end of March.

The track is in order for the current level of use, but aspects which would need to be tackled before a more intensive service is introduced include re-sleeping sections of track, re-fencing a considerable length and improving communication with provision of 3 GSMR masts. Completing these tasks before the service starts is simpler, cheaper, and would make the service more reliable from the start.

The major part of the presentation was on the configuration of the proposed Parkway Station. The car park would be for about 210 cars rather than the hoped for 300. It is on made up, levelled ground below the Forthglade dogfood factory. Various platform layouts were presented. They took account of the requirements of Aggregate Industries to run freight trains from Meldon Quarry (currently mothballed), the current leaseholder (to end of 2019) Dartmoor Railway currently running Christmas trains east (to approximate location of Parkway), and the regular daily passenger train service to Exeter. There is concern that the options were limited in that, unsatisfactorily, no access was shown directly from Hameldon road on the east side of town. The 900 households in the new estates there would have nearly another mile to go around to the entrance in the Business Park.

Publicity for the forum's aspirations continue in the shape of plans with Great Western to run a special train from Okehampton to Stratford-upon-Avon and Oxford in April.

A very positive note is that Government has tasked First Group's GWR to draw up plans for a daily service to be introduced 'as soon as practicable'.

## **Railfuture Devon and Cornwall Meeting at Crediton**

*Sue Baxter*

Four DRSA committee members attended a full afternoon of presentations on 25<sup>th</sup> November.

Railfuture Chairman Gerrard Duddridge opened on a positive note with brief details of ongoing schemes. The obstacles to reopening to Tavistock and to Bideford were “surmountable” – housing near a viaduct, and a new road into Barnstaple respectively.

On an even more positive note, Mike Ireland gave an OkeRail overview. In addition to the well understood benefits of a daily service to Okehampton (better access to varied employment, education, medical, leisure and entertainment services), he suggested attention should also be drawn to the underused natural capital of the area – national park, wildlife reserves, reservoirs, coasts and woodlands. Better rail access would have big health and economic benefits for people outside and inside the region. Following from the support of the Connect Bude group, more thinking is being given to good bus connections. For example, Launceston could have a 20 minute journey from Okehampton.

Discussions are ongoing re funding the necessary 3 GSMR communication masts needed before the daily Okehampton-Exeter service starts. This would finally dispense with the signalman at Crediton having to give an Okehampton bound driver a dedicated mobile phone – which does not give full coverage.

Tarka Rail Association news included the fact that the Crediton signalbox is now open 24/7. Okehampton’s current nearest fully timetabled station, Copplestone, will be getting a 60 space car park as part of planning permission for new housing. The TRA is campaigning for an improvement in frequency by having a passing loop at Portsmouth Arms, an increase in the length of trains, and more trains (which could be achieved as far as Crediton with services to Okehampton!).





Tawlink, a light rail solution to improving rail transport between Barnstaple and Braunton, was presented by the Chairman of Combe Rail, Richard Heacock. This group was formed to investigate reinstating the railway north from Barnstaple which was closed in 1970. However,

the trackbed was converted to a cycleway with funding from the laying of a transatlantic cable along its length. The current river flood defences are now in the formation, and the bridge across the Taw was demolished in 1977. Hence they have carried out a pre-feasibility study into sharing the old railway formation with the Tarka trail and then running through the street in Barnstaple. The A361 between the settlements is a very busy and dangerous stretch of road. Braunton already has a population of 8,000 set to increase by 20% as the employment opportunities increase in the Chivenor and Pottington Business Parks. There is significant town traffic congestion which could be relieved by the proposal to incorporate a Park and Ride to the northwest of Barnstaple with easy access also by the new road bridge from the south. An ambitious scheme and we wish them well.

Finally, Chris Irwin, director of Travelwatch South West CIC, rounded off with some interesting statistics. Illustrating the effect of the road traffic “congestion plague of cities” by reference to an increase in road accident deaths, and premature deaths due to exposure to nitrous oxides and particulates, he mentioned that Exeter city centre has 4.3mph road traffic speeds during peak hours. The government forecasts a rise of 17% in households by 2036 whereas SW councils predict a 30% increase. For every 21 rail journeys within, to, and from the South West in 1996, there are now at least 50 journeys, with the biggest increase being in travel to London.

# **They once worked our line – Some 19<sup>th</sup> Century London & South Western Railway employees on the Dartmoor Railway.**

*Geoff Horner*

## **Part 2 – North Tawton**

In this the second in a series of (very) occasional articles looking back at some of the 19<sup>th</sup> century railwaymen who worked on what is now the Dartmoor Railway, we next head westwards from Bow down the line to the station serving the town of North Tawton. The information is taken from the LSWR staff records, 19<sup>th</sup> century census records and directories available on Ancestry.co.uk and other on-line resources.

### **1870's**

The decade of the 1870's opened with the 1871 census recording William Hodge holding the position of Station Agent. The available LSWR records throw no light on the railway career of William so when he came to North Tawton is unknown - however as the line had opened to North Tawton on 1<sup>st</sup> November 1865 it is possible that he took up his position at that time. With the arrival of a new Station Agent in September 1871 he disappears from the public records until the late 1870's when he is recorded in a trade directory as the Station Master at Okehampton.

George Hillard (or Hilliard as the LSWR staff records have his surname), having been Station Agent or Master at Bow for just over three years from 1868 to 1871, moved in September of that year to become Station Agent at North Tawton on a salary of £85.00 per annum. As noted in Part 1 (*The Dartmoor Pony, Winter 2012/13*) his career at Bow was not entirely unblemished and this trend towards blotting his copy book continued whilst at North Tawton. In January 1875 he was cautioned and fined 20/- for "want of energy in clearing snow", another 20/- fine was levied in July 1876 for his "inattention" and a further 20/- in October 1876 for "not exchanging the train staff". In spite of these lapses George apparently merited an increase in salary in April 1876 to £95.00p.a. However, in October 1877 he was fined £5

for “being absent from the station and improper conduct in respect of Transfer Orders to be removed to another station”. The LSWR staff archives record that George resigned from the company in the October of 1877. One can only wonder, did he jump before he was pushed? Later census records show that George never again worked for a railway company.

George’s successor as Station Agent/Master at North Tawton was Samuel Gribble who was appointed in November 1877 at a salary of £100.00p.a. Census records for 1881 suggest that rather than residing at the North Tawton station house he lived at Eggesford and travelled, presumably daily, from there to North Tawton. In those days this would have been quite possible by train with a change at Yeoford. The LSWR staff records show that he remained at North Tawton until the middle of the next decade.

The only other railwayman known to have been at North Tawton in the 1870’s was an engine driver by the name of Joseph Perkins. The LSWR records are silent on his railway career, however in the 1881 census he is recorded as a retired engine driver living back in his birth county of Worcestershire.

### **1880’s**

Samuel Gribble continued as Station Agent/Master (with a salary increase to £105.00p.a in July 1882) until April 1884 when he transferred to Chard.

William Coles joined the LSWR at North Tawton on 9<sup>th</sup> September 1880 as a Porter on a wage of 15/- a week. He received a steady increase in wage until 2<sup>nd</sup> July 1882 when he was appointed Horseman at 18/- a week. Towards the end of 1882 he married Sarah Stoneman at North Tawton. William held the grade of Horseman to the end of the decade, receiving a further increase of 1/- to 19/- a week on 12<sup>th</sup> December 1889 – just in time for Christmas!

## 1890's

William Coles marked the start of the 1890's with promotion to the grade of Exeter Section Relieving Porter and Acting Brearsman\*, his wage increasing to 21/- a week. In the 1891 census he is recorded living at 101 Clifton Street, Exeter, with Sarah and their four children. His occupation is given as Railway Porter. He continued in this grade plus Brearsman throughout the 1890's - his wage increasing steadily to reach 26/- a week in 1898. In March 1903 he left Exeter to become a goods guard based at Salisbury. Sadly he enjoyed just 4 months in this role being killed in an accident at Wimborne, Dorset, in July of that year when whilst alighting from his train on to the platform he slipped and fell in the gap between his van and the platform. His body was returned to Exeter where he was buried. His estate, valued at £15.00 was left to his wife Sarah. Compensation of £218-0-5 was paid out – such were the perils of the life of a railwayman 114 years ago.

On the 10<sup>th</sup> July 1899 John Reddaway, aged 17, joined as a Lad Porter on a wage of 10/-a week having put forward four testimonials in support of his application for employment on the railway. He remained at North Tawton until moving to Tipton as a Porter in 1903.

Finally, a very brief career of Porter was tried by one John Ford of North Tawton who joined the LSWR on the 18<sup>th</sup> December 1899 aged 18 years nine months only to resign two months later on the 21<sup>st</sup> February 1900.

*Our next station stop will be Sampford Courtenay!*

*\*I have been unable to find out what the occupation of a “Brearsman” was although it may have had something to do with the care of horses. If you know, please contact the Editor.*

## **Footplate Days**

*A short essay on his experience of learning to drive a steam train by Paul van der Linden.*



In the spring of 2017 I attended a five-day course to learn how to drive a steam locomotive because I am an inveterate fan of all things mechanical that involve transport, especially if it means getting my hands, and possibly the rest of me, dirty.



We started at 9 o'clock sharp on Monday morning at Isfield Station on the Lavender Line. A small group of intrepid wanabee steam train drivers drawn from all parts of society – a student, a computer programmer, a scientist and a civil engineer – but in our overalls we were all equal apprentices under the watchful eye of

Clive Groome, our mentor and teacher. A man who worked on the railways for nearly sixty years, and who saw the peak and decline of steam trains on the railway. What Clive doesn't know about steam trains isn't worth knowing. "Remember to keep your ejectors open" he said as he welcomed me at the door, and then made me a cup of tea that did exactly that.

The first two days were mostly classroom and theory – the photo above is me standing at the end of the platform, smiling in blissful ignorance of the hard work that lay before me. We made oilers and learned all about the valves, pistons and reciprocating parts that need regulating, throttling, reversing, injecting, cocking or otherwise controlling to make the train start and, just as importantly bring it to a stop in an orderly and controlled manner.





Our theoretical learning then became more practical on the second day as we went out to the sidings and learnt how move the points, how to couple and uncouple wagons and, with a simulated firebox, we learned how to correctly stoke the fire - don't be misled, the shovel and the coal were very real!

On Wednesday we were judged to be sufficiently skilled to test our skills on a real steam train! With real steam! For this we went to the Spa Valley Railway who have a fine collection of steam trains, carriages and wagons. The Spa Valley Railway let us learn on their 'number 72' an 0-6-0 tank engine in National Coal Board livery. We couldn't have asked for a finer engine, and our first job was to make sure she was all oiled, watered and fired up. As soon as there



was sufficient pressure we backed out in to the yard and filled her up with water – she was a thirsty girl. The photo shows the size of the water tank we filled her up from. We spent the day running up and down a few miles of the line learning how to start, speed up,

slow down and stop, how to handle gradients, when to fill inject water in to the boiler, and when to put coal on the fire. The picture here shows me pulling back on the reverser so the Stephenson linkage is engaged and the engine will be ready to move off when



I open the regulator. It also shows the layout of the controls in the driver's cab – I can still remember what they are for – the regulator is the big red V-shaped lever in the middle.

And here is the boiler pressure gauge, reading 160psi which is the optimum operating pressure. It also shows the driver's sausage sandwich in the silver foil keeping warm on top of the boiler, which is a far better option than frying eggs and bacon on the shovel. Oh, to be driving a train, the roar of the engine, the smell of the oil, the warmth of the fire, the wind in your hair, and the shout of the instructor as you ignore a signal.



Back at the yard in the evenings we had to clean the engine, which meant emptying the ash pan. To do this one has to bend double and climb down into a pit underneath the engine's firebox. Using a long metal tool which sprays water out of the end you rake the still burning ashes from the ash pan. If the ash doesn't get you then you are either burnt by the embers or soaked by the hose. Or both. While bent double in an underground pit with no escape – did I really pay for this. The picture does not do justice to the experience. Just as dirty but without the thrill of





burning and drowning at the same time was cleaning out the smoke box at the front of the engine. This gets full of fine ash which needs to be shovelled out.

The last two days of the course were spent making longer journeys up and down the track (up to 10 miles) and honing our skills on gradients, with braking, reversing, shunting and coupling and uncoupling the brake van, and learning new swear words. By the end of day five we felt and looked like seasoned veterans, although we had only just learned the basics from Clive, shown enjoying a well-earned cup of tea in the picture below.



I thoroughly enjoyed the week, even more so as my brother was also one of the pupils on the course, and having earned the right to wear a driver's cap I am enjoying the rattle of the brake van as we return to the yard, and thence supper and a beer.



## Rosie's Diary - When it is good to ride, and when it is not!

By Rosie



As you can see I had good company over Christmas, making myself available to help out on the Welsh Highland Railway. There I responded quickly to '*tyrd yma*' (come here), when *Sion Corn* (Santa) was offering me a '*bisgien*' (biscuit). I reckoned a *bisgien* was well deserved after coping with many tiny two legs running unsteadily towards me, wide eyed and ready to pat and prod every bit

of me. However as soon as *Sion Corn* arrived they mostly went all shy and ignored me. Phew! - I can only take so many little children (without biscuits). It is not every day that you meet an elf from Zambia, but it just shows how good Santa Trains are at bringing everyone together.

Now I am pleased to say that some of you recognised Chelfham Station in my last Mystery Pictures. Sorry you couldn't see the Chelfham Viaduct clearly. It is fenced off so I could not pad across and make an inspection, but it looked in perfect maintenance through the gate. It is very impressive from below. All part of the Lynton and Barnstaple Railway under re-opening. We were investigating it after travelling on wooden seats (ok for 4 paws) behind *Lyn* in her first weekend in steam at Woody Bay in September.

Back at Okehampton in January, on the 31 weekend, I eschewed the



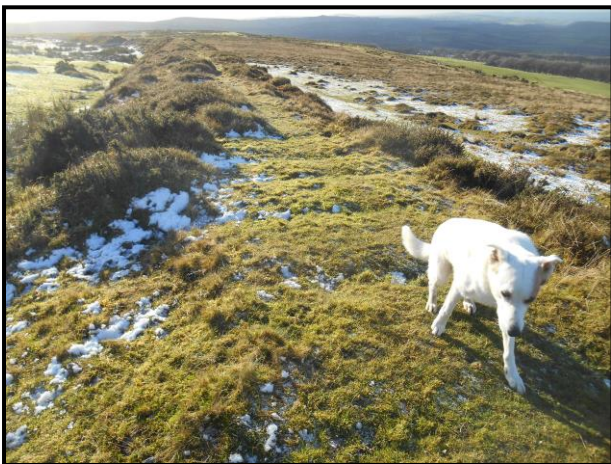
chance of a cab ride in the *Rocket* up to Meldon Quarry. You can see why – there were just empty tracks, pouring rain and no chance to jump down and chase rabbits under carriages! Only my friend Dave Hunt was tough enough to be out there, taking photographs.



A couple of weeks before that I wasn't *even offered* a train ride! Then, when I heard it was a **Rail Grinder**, I just thought I was lucky to miss it! Imagine the teeth it must have on it! With its seven carriages it manages to grind the rails in both directions at once. It was painted prettily with a celebration of trains everywhere. I spotted it was even up to date with Crossrail, sporting the silhouette of the new Class 345 nose.

Time to get puzzling again. Where do you think I was just after Christmas?

Enjoying a good run, I found myself crossing the regular bumps which indicate an old railway formation. Where is it and what did it carry? My 2 legs once made 100 ruckles out of the stuff in Somerset, one 1960's summer.



I've rambled on enough – hope your ramblings have been as good!

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

**Chairman:** Philip Wagstaff

**Vice-Chairman:** Sue Baxter

**Secretary:** Jon Kelsey

**Treasurer:** Christine Horner

**Membership Secretary & Volunteer Coordinator:**

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