
The Train at Platform 1

The Friends of Honiton Station Newsletter 25 - April 2022

Welcome to the April newsletter. Can it really be our second birthday edition already? When we began this project, at the very start of the first lockdown, no-one could have any idea just how important it would quickly become in keeping members, supporters and the local community connected with each other and with the railway. Thanks to the arrival of our website, maintained with such expertise by Charles Pegman, and with the support of members who have provided us with photographs and articles, the newsletter has quickly become a key feature of our work.



Photograph by Dave Tozer

New Forum For Community Rail in East Devon

March saw the first meeting of the East Devon Line Forum which is holding its meetings, at least initially, online. The Chairman attended to represent our group.

The forum focuses on the section of the Waterloo to Exeter railway line that runs through East Devon, serving Axminster, Honiton, Feniton, Whimble, Cranbrook and Pinhoe stations.

Andrew Ardley, the Regional Development Manager for South Western Railway, and Paul Morrey from the Transport Co-ordination Service at Devon County Council are both backing this initiative, which builds on a group which met for an initial meeting at Cranbrook shortly before the pandemic.

The group's four key purposes are:

- To act as an information exchange on matters relating to the railway, train service and stations;
- To seek to encourage community involvement with the railway and linked to the railway;
- To encourage the promotion of rail travel and the places served by the railway, including places served by onward links including walking, cycling or by bus;
- To work with the rail industry on seeking further improvements to rail services and facilities.

Attending were leading figures from local Station Adoption Groups, as well as County Councillors, District Councillors, Exeter City Council, town and parish council representatives.

The meeting was chaired by Cllr Phil Twiss, Devon County Council Cabinet Member for Finance, DCC Councillor for Honiton and Feniton, and a district councillor for Honiton St. Michael's. Phil has taken a keen interest in the railways for many years, and regularly raises the need for infrastructure improvements in his election literature.



During the meeting, Richard Burningham, Manager of the Devon and Cornwall Rail Partnership (DCRP), gave the 21 people attending an update on a wide range of projects along the line, and more widely, in which they are involved. His presentation ended with a short film of a recent Try The Train session enjoyed by children from Whimple Primary School, who took a trip to Exeter.

Richard drew attention to the range of things being done to encourage people to return to the railway. He reported that an updated version of the station-specific leaflet previously produced, among other places, for Honiton is being produced soon, to be delivered by Royal Mail. There are also several useful websites, including Great Scenic Railways and Jurassic by Rail. These websites can be accessed through the links page on our website. There were plans for a joint project with Dorset to promote the Jurassic Coast this summer and for a Stations in Bloom celebration.

Paula Aldridge, Community Rail Manager for SWR, updated attendees on the latest news. Paula said she was looking forward to visiting the East Devon Line to see for herself the work being undertaken. Unfortunately, the visit had subsequently to be postponed until May, due to illness.

Paula reminded those at the meeting of the key aspects of her role, including working with her colleagues to get the necessary permissions for projects Station Adoption Groups like ourselves wish to tackle. She also reminded the meeting about the sources of funding SWR has put in place to which groups can apply.

Paula also reported on the appointment by SWR of Matthew Parkinson, its new Communications Apprentice. Matthew will be putting together a quarterly Community Newsletter and is keen to hear about any interesting stories from the many Station Adoption Groups like ourselves across the SWR network. The first issue of the newsletter is due to appear shortly.

The final presentation was by Andrew Ardley, Regional Development Manager for SWR. He gave an update on SWR's performance, and how it had been impacted by Covid-related staff absences, by staff training issues and external factors such as the stormy weather. He reiterated that many causes of trains being delayed had to do with infrastructure problems. These were made worse by the effect of the single track nature of this part of the line.

Andrew reported that long-distance travel was now back to around 68% of pre-pandemic levels. However, there were still rather fewer passengers on commuter routes. SWR is presently running a promotion focused on commuters (see below).

Andrew also gave an update on progress with the plan for line improvements west of Honiton. Devon County Council has now agreed to fund the next step, which is further work towards preparing the outline business case. This stage should be completed this summer. However, there is still much to be done, and with government money in increasingly short supply for infrastructure enhancement, rather than for infrastructure maintenance, chances of seeing this project make further progress are presently not very good.

Andrew reminded those at the meeting that continued efforts to lobby for this work are crucial. Despite all the MPs along the line, and across the region, being supportive, it was vital to keep the pressure up. SERUG met with an All Party Parliamentary Group, chaired by West Dorset MP Chris Loder, at the end of March, in order to continue to put the case for the line improvements.

A key factor was that it made sense for the work to be done at the same time as the Salisbury and Exeter re-signalling projects. However, there is still no definite word as to when these works might take place. Infrastructure improvements ought also to be completed, in step with the replacement of the rolling stock. It made sense for everything to be delivered, as far as possible, together.

This useful and constructive meeting ended with a decision to meet again in around four months time, and to continue to meet about three times a year thereafter.

Community Rail Give Local Stories a New Voice

At the end of February, Community Rail Partnerships and volunteers from across the South West and South East, together with Community Rail Network and start-up tech company Window Seater, launched a series of immersive audio travel guides to inspire people to travel by train.

We were particularly pleased to see this project bear fruit so soon, after our Chairman was invited by Window Seater last year to take part in a one-to-one consultation exercise on the overall purpose and functionality of their planned app. To coincide with the launch of the app, we received the following message:

Dear Friends of Honiton

I hope you are all well. A few months ago a member of your team took part in an interview with my colleague Rachel Evans, about our project to improve the rail customer experience, collaborating with GWR and the Community Rail Network.

I see from the notes that you and Rachel discussed a number of points, including ideas for possible stories that could be told along your line. Your input was very useful, so thank you so much for your time on that call.

You also expressed an interest in finding out more when the project had moved along, so I just wanted to let you know that we have now launched the new Window Seater app.

The free app, consisting of our first 10x guides, can be downloaded for either for the iPhone from the App Store, or for Android phones from the Play Store. To make the most of the app experience, we recommend people enjoy it on a train, but everyone can also listen to a guide or the stories within each guide manually at home, by clicking the play icons or the "Play Story" buttons.

Window Seater is a new project that connects rail travellers to the world outside their window. Its geolocated audio guides - produced in collaboration with GWR and the Community Rail Network - bring travellers closer to the communities, cultures and histories of the places that they're moving through.

The app has now launched and the team at Window Seater would like to invite everyone passionate about Community Rail to get involved, to test the app and let them know their thoughts.



This is a great opportunity to help raise awareness of stories around rail, and to help bring new visitors into local communities.

Thank you again for your help last year, and I hope we can connect in the future and continue our conversations.

Community-based partnerships and station volunteer groups working across the GWR network to engage with their local communities, came together on this project, backed by the Department for Transport's 'First of a Kind' innovation fund, aimed at projects that increase confidence and enhance the experience of rail travel.

Working with Community Rail Network and travel tech experts at Window Seater, they have for the first time collected and brought together local voices, stories and histories related to nine of the South West and South East's stunning railway lines, in a series of mindful, geo-located audio travel guides.

Window Seater connects rail travellers to the world outside their window, providing high quality audio stories, which link the fascinating features along the railway and beyond the stations. Not only do the guides provide an immersive, enriching experience for rail passengers, but it is hoped they will encourage more would-be rail travellers to try the train for green, enjoyable and community-minded leisure trips.

Nine audio guides are available to download for free from Apple and Google app stores, featuring:

- Bristol to Worcester Line
- Cotswold Line (Oxford to Hereford)
- Golden Valley Line (Cheltenham to Swindon)

- Heart of Wessex Line (Bristol Temple Meads to Weymouth)
- London to Oxford Line
- North Downs Line (Reading to Gatwick Airport)
- Reading to Basingstoke Line
- Severn Beach Line (Bristol Temple Meads to Severn Beach)
- TransWilts Line (Swindon to Westbury)

Drawing on local knowledge and insights from the community rail movement, the Window Seater guides will provide people with a different way to enjoy train travel, from new passengers to frequent travellers.

Highlights from some of the guides include the story of how a Cotswold market town inspired J.R.R Tolkien in Moreton-in-Marsh, the origins of the world's first steam-powered bus service just outside Cheltenham, the historic role Redhill in the North Downs played in war times, and expert tips on where to go in Bath provided by a local tour guide.

To listen, passengers can download the free Window Seater app from the Apple or Android app stores. Passengers then simply choose a route, grab their headphones and enjoy the journey learning about the landscape and places they move through.

The ethos behind the app is all about travelling mindfully and building a better awareness of, and connections to, the people, history and cultures through which we pass when we travel.

Jools Townsend, chief executive of Community Rail Network, said:

“Many people don’t realise the scope for exploring Britain’s stunning landscapes, pretty villages and historic sites by rail – and making use of our wonderful, often little-known, community rail lines and stations is a great way to do this.

“We’re proud to have partnered with Window Seater and our community rail members across the South West and South East on this innovative initiative. We hope it will inspire more people to take the train, uncover hidden gems and learn more about the communities and locations the railway takes you through, for wonderful, green, community-friendly days out and longer trips.”

Marcus Allender, business development director at Window Seater, said:

“We are delighted to be working directly with the people who know the stories along the railway best – our new tech allows us to harness the passion and knowledge of these communities, increasing the quality and scalability of our guides.

“Improving customer experience, better drawing on community rail and getting people back on trains are all core goals of the government’s new Williams-Shapps Plan for Rail, which this project dovetails with perfectly.”

The geo-located Window Seater guides are free to download from major app stores, and you can find out more at:

[ScenicRailBritain.com/WindowSeater](https://www.ScenicRailBritain.com/WindowSeater).



Rail Delivery Group Launches New Campaign to Welcome Travellers Back to the Railway

Last month saw the Rail Delivery Group, which represents train operating companies, launch the latest instalment of their 'Let's get back on track' campaign, this time with a greater emphasis on business travellers and commuters.

Including video on demand, radio, out of home, paid digital and public relations, the latest campaign is designed to inspire a nationwide return to rail, by reminding everyone that nothing connects us to the people, places and things we love the most like rail.

Highlighting how rail is what it described as "an enabler of connection", the campaign brings to life the different journeys people take by using the train every day; heading back to the office, spontaneous meet ups and being able to explore with loved ones.

At the same time, South Western Railway's new rewards programme is offering rail commuters discounts on food, drink and a whole host of attractions across the capital. Through its new Commuter Rewards scheme, SWR is dishing out nearly 50 money saving deals, with offers ranging from complementary wine to money off speed dating.

SWR customers can bag a bargain through SWR's Commuter Rewards page, with the programme being entirely free to sign up to and continuously updated.

The new scheme has been designed specifically for commuters in light of a growing number of people returning to the office, and forms part of SWR's new 'Spread Your Wings' campaign, which is set to feature on local radio and television.

The campaign, which launched in February, is designed to remind SWR customers of the benefits of getting back into the office and the flexible ticket options now available. It is being fronted by two avian ambassadors, Wesley Peck, a young business-pigeon and a successful execu-bird called Sandy C. Gull.

As part of the animation, the two birds, who sparked an unlikely friendship on a SWR commuter train a few years ago, are reunited as they both return to the office. Together, they discuss their plans for the day, from lunch with clients and business meetings to an exhibition and drinks with friends, in a conversation packed with bird-inspired word play.

Commenting, SWR's Commercial Director Peter Williams said:

"Heading to the office needn't be all work and no play. Getting back into the capital gives us all the perfect excuse to get the best out of London, from its great pubs and restaurants to world class museums and shops.

"By offering dozens of great deals designed specifically for commuters, our new rewards programme makes a whole range of post-work activities even easier and cheaper to enjoy.

"To complement the opportunity for our customers to bag a bargain, we're delighted to launch our new campaign, which is ably led by our two avian friends, Sandy and Wes. With new, flexible ticket options available too, now is the perfect time for our customers to spread their wings and rediscover all that the big city has to offer!"

Engineering Report for April and May

Passengers are reminded of the need to check details of forthcoming engineering work, preferably by comparing information on the website with the details shown on SWR's Journey Planner.

This was brought into sharp focus, when SWR's website clearly showed Waterloo to Exeter services starting from Reading on March 5th and 12th. This information was incorrect. It was only when a colleague read our March newsletter, and queried the information with SWR, that the company agreed to correct the the website, although the information was not corrected until shortly before the weekends in question, and the poster at the station, of course, remained incorrect.

Sunday 3rd April

The lines in the Salisbury area will be closed until mid-morning due to maintenance work.

London Waterloo to Exeter St. David's services will terminate at Andover. Buses will run between Andover and Gillingham. A revised service will operate between Gillingham and Exeter.

Friday 15th April until Monday 18th April (Easter Weekend)

Over the Easter weekend, the lines between Yeovil Junction and Honiton will be closed from Friday to Monday inclusive due to maintenance work.

On Sunday, the line will closed all day between Yeovil Junction and Exeter St. David's.

Friday, Saturday and Monday

London Waterloo to Exeter St. David's services will terminate at Yeovil Junction. Buses will run between Yeovil Junction and Honiton. A revised service will run between Honiton and Exeter.

Sunday

London Waterloo to Exeter St. David's services will terminate at Yeovil Junction. Buses will run between Yeovil Junction and Exeter St. David's.

Saturday 30th April and Sunday 1st May

The lines in the Gillingham area will be closed all weekend due to maintenance work.

London Waterloo to Exeter St. David's services will be revised and will be diverted between Salisbury and Yeovil Junction via Westbury. Some services will terminate at Salisbury.

A revised service will run between Gillingham and Exeter St. David's. Buses will run between Salisbury and Yeovil Junction.

At present, no other engineering work is planned to take place on our line during May and June. However, passengers are advised to check nearer the time, by looking at SWR's website.

Devon Transport in the Twenties

We learned recently about a joint event being run by Devon History Society and Newton Abbot Museum which may be of interest to members.

On Saturday 23rd April, Devon History Society is holding its first live event since 2019 at Newton Abbot Museum.

It is an all day symposium on 'Devon's Transport in the Twenties', covering what proves to be a decade of huge change, as motor vehicles began to give serious competition to the railways and opened up access to areas of the county that had hitherto seemed remote and inaccessible.

The programme for the day is as follows:

Morning Session 10.15 – 12.30

Professor Colin Divall, Professor Emeritus of Railway Studies at York University, and former Director of Railway Studies at the National Railway Museum in York: The Roaring Twenties? Consuming Mobilities in Devon, 1918-1930.

Robert Crawley, Westcountry Historic Omnibus and Travel Trust Chair: Solids to Pneumatics – how public transport evolved in 1920s Devon.

Lunch.

Bring your own or buy locally. You will be able to eat your lunch in the museum.

Afternoon Session 13.30 – 15.10

Choice of two items from a list of talks and activities including:

- (a) Visit Newton Abbot's railway station (rebuilt in 1922);
- (b) Visit Railway Studies Library;
- (c) View Museum Display and Slide Show;
- (d) Talk on the 1920s development of the Honiton to Exeter main road (later the A30); and
- (e) Talk on Devon's last new railway, Torrington to Halwill.

Conclusion 15.15 – 15.30

Further Research into Devon's 1920s Transport

Tickets are £10 each, including coffee/tea. To book, log on to Eventbrite at:

[eventbrite.co.uk/e/spring-conference-on-devons-1920s-transport-history-tickets-255995969837](https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/spring-conference-on-devons-1920s-transport-history-tickets-255995969837)

Friends Prepare to Launch New Group Plan for 2022

Over the last few days, we have launched a consultation among members, supporters and Community Rail partners on our new Group Plan for 2022 - 2023. This follows a series of meetings at the station. I hope that everyone will take the chance to be involved in creating this important document, which sets out our priorities for the year ahead. A copy of an early draft document for discussion was circulated in March to all members and supporters.

At this stage, we believe that our key aim over the next year should be:

Working in partnership with our community –

- To celebrate our local history and heritage;
- To support the health and well-being of residents;
- To contribute to a sustainable future for the town.

The final document, which looks at how we might achieve this aim, will be covered in more detail in the May newsletter, once all members have had a chance to offer their input.

Two Friends Members Elected to Town Council

Two of our members were recently elected to Honiton Town Council. On March 10th, Jenny Brown was one of four candidates elected in a poll in St. Michael's Ward, held following the resignation of a number of former councillors.

In her election address, Jenny commented on her time as a district councillor and lead for tourism, and on her role in the The Friends of Honiton Station. She said:

"I worked with South Western Railway to adopt our part of the railway that runs between Axminster and Pinhoe, naming it 'The East Devon Line'. This was all done with a view to achieving greater footfall within our community and therefore supporting local business. The project also included the brightening up of stations displaying photographs within the shelters that were taken by a local Honiton man, Gary Hoplin.

"Attractive planters were also installed by working in partnership with other town councillors and local volunteers - like minded community members who take pride in their town and its amenities. This group, now named 'The Friends of Honiton Station', has grown both in strength and reputation."

Jenny has already proposed several interesting projects, that members can read about in the draft Group Plan.

Also re-joining the council is former mayor Caroline Kolek, who was one of three councillors elected unopposed in St. Paul's Ward. Caroline was key both in setting up our group, including liaising with Tesco's book sale to raise some of the money for work at the station, and in the installation of the planters.

Caroline and Jenny are keen to see the planting project move forward this year and Caroline has already set to work on the five planters and the two pots on platform 1. Members and supporters who would like to help with this work should contact Caroline in the first instance.

During her previous time on the Town Council, Caroline was responsible for promoting tourism and for links with The Friends of Honiton Station. She also spearheaded the successful campaign to see community defibrillators installed across the town. We share this vision, with our campaign continuing to see a defibrillator installed at the station, funded by the Hospital League of Friends and supported by the ambulance trust.

We look forward to working with Caroline, Jenny and all the members of Honiton Town Council in the future, as we all work to promote the railway, improve links between the railway and the community and to campaign for a better railway.

SWR Doing Its Bit for Wildlife Recovery

South Western Railway recently reported that key railway stations will be transformed into hubs for wildlife, thanks to an exciting new partnership between the RSPB and SWR. Through steps such as planting wildflowers, cutting holes in fences for 'hedgehog highways' and putting up nestboxes, the stations will act as refuges for wildlife in trouble.

In 2014 South West Trains, the franchise-holder at the time, created homes for local wildlife such as bats and reptiles at three flagship stations in Surrey: Effingham Junction, Oxshott and Hinchley Wood. Following on from this success, four more stations will be transformed into wildlife-friendly gardens across the south of England: Sunningdale in Berkshire, Havant in Hampshire, Ashurst in the New Forest, and Brading on the Isle of Wight.

At these stations, SWR and the RSPB plan to make these stations buzz with wildlife and provide homes for native species. They will sow wildflower meadows, put up nestboxes and bee hotels, and work with local groups to encourage residents and commuters to take wildlife-friendly actions in their own homes. The partners say that they chose these four flagship stations for their proximity to existing habitats and nature reserves, as well as their available space for wildlife. For instance, Brading Station on the Isle of Wight is next to the RSPB's Brading Marsh nature reserve, a Site of Special Scientific Interest.

The RSPB will also support SWR in their goal to become a biodiversity net positive business by 2030 through activities such as the management of plants across their stations and depots.

Bag The Best Deal on Local Train Tickets

With rail fares increasing at the start of March, it is important to remember that there are still some great bargains to be had on travel into Exeter from Honiton. The standard day return ticket is now £8.40. This is valid for travel before 9 a.m. However, if you travel between 9 a.m. and Noon, this falls slightly to £8.30. For the best bargain on a day return, you can travel after Noon for just £6.

Now comes the clever bit. Remember that all Devon residents can buy a Devon and Cornwall Railcard for just £12 a year. With this railcard (or indeed any other railcard to which you are entitled, such as a Senior Railcard), the cost of this journey is even better value, provided that you travel after 9 a.m. Just a handful of journeys each year is all you need to start to save money.

Between 9 a.m. and Noon, the return ticket to Exeter with a railcard falls to just £5.45. And after Noon, the cost of this journey dips even further to just £3.95, which is less than half the standard or off-peak return fares.

Are Ticket Offices Under Threat?

March saw a report in the press that hundreds of rail ticket offices were under threat of closure. A spokesman for The Rail Delivery Group (RDG), which represents train operating companies, said:

"The pandemic has been an unprecedented financial shock to the railway. While no decisions have been taken over ticket offices, with the acceleration of changing travel patterns and more passengers migrating to digital technology, many jobs will need to change to become more passenger-centric.

"Train companies are working with unions on how to address those changes, while making sure the industry takes no more than its fair share from the taxpayer."

The RDG was responding to report in The Sunday Times that hundreds of rail ticket offices could potentially close as part of a plan to modernise the railways. The report claimed that the bosses of rail operators are in talks with the government about the closures, which may result in redundancies if staff cannot be moved to other roles.

One union said that it will ballot staff if compulsory redundancies are used.

The BBC reported the claims, explaining that during the pandemic, train passenger numbers collapsed and so did revenues.

Passengers numbers were still recovering, they said, with big changes such as hybrid working affecting commuter levels and season ticket sales.

To ensure the railways kept running during the pandemic, they added, the government had stepped in to finance the industry.



Recently, rail minister Wendy Morton told the BBC that taxpayers had supported the railways with more than £14bn of funding, and that taxpayers had to get a good return on what they had invested.

As the picture above shows, until recently SWR had two ticket machines on the platform at Honiton. During the third lockdown, the second of these was removed. There is no word at present of any plans to instal a new generation of ticket machine at the station. The priority appears to be in encouraging passengers to book online, and where possible to use e-tickets kept on passengers' phones.

However, time and again passengers have expressed their desire to see staffed ticket offices, where they can get personalised advice and information, as well as purchasing tickets. Our own station staff at Honiton remain popular and much appreciated for their knowledge and skill.

How Accessible Are Class 159 Trains?

There is a special section of SWR's website devoted to each class of train operated across their network. As well as information about the layout and number of seats, there is a very useful section on the accessibility features of each type of train.

Here is what the website has to say about the trains that operate along The East Devon Line.

What accessible features does the Class 159 South Western Turbo have?



For physically disabled people:

- Power-operated external doors, which contrast with the rest of the train. At low platforms wheelchair users may have some difficulty reaching the door open buttons from outside.
- Large external door operation buttons, with what the button does clearly marked in English and Braille. They contrast with the door and light up when active.
- Gender-neutral lavatories are provided throughout the train. A universal lavatory with call-for-aid buttons can be located in the area near the position wheelchair users. There are also handholds and a low-level sink with button-activated water and hand dryer. There may not be adequate room to manoeuvre a larger wheelchair or scooter inside the lavatory.
- Call for aid buttons near each wheelchair position, with direct communication to the driver.

- An on-board ramp with locking pins for the train that the crew are trained to deploy. The gap between the train and platform can often be difficult for wheelchair users and customers with limited leg and upper body strength. Assistance joining and leaving the train is available.

For deaf, hard-of-hearing, and sound-sensitive people:

- Assistance dogs are welcome on board but must be kept on a lead.
- An on-board audiovisual announcement system in English. This system issues the stations where the train stops, as well as security and safety messages. The system can be overridden by the on-board crew.
- A quiet carriage.
- Our crew all carry smartphones, which you can use for alternative forms of communication.
- These trains have powerful diesel engines and gearboxes, which can be heard on board. When the train is accelerating or at high speed, the engines can be loud and heard clearly in the carriage.

For blind, partially-sighted people, and photosensitive people:

- Assistance dogs are welcome on board but must be kept on a lead.
- Large external door operation buttons, with what the button does clearly marked in English and Braille. They contrast with the door and light up when active. A chime will also sound when the doors have been activated, and an alarm will sound when they are closing.
- Unfortunately the nature of how our trains are powered means that we can't guarantee lighting will be flicker-free. Warm fluorescent lighting is used throughout, with light diffusers.

For Autistic, anxious and Neurodiverse people:

- Assistance dogs are welcome on board but must be kept on a lead.
- We welcome anxious or nervous travellers to try the train with us before making a journey. Our ambassador team will happily support individuals or groups at a station, navigating buying tickets, boarding trains, travelling, and seeking help if you need it.
- Our crew all carry smartphones, which you can use for alternative forms of communication.
- The diesel engines and gearboxes on these trains mean that carriages will often vibrate when the train is accelerating. This is completely normal for these trains and will reduce when the train is at a higher speed.

For people with severe allergies or who are immuno-compromised:

- Our heating and cooling systems are roof-mounted on the train. We're not able to turn these off except in emergencies.
- You're welcome to use a safety/particulate mask on board if you need to.

GWR Marks International Women's Day

Great Western Railway, Network Rail and the British Transport Police teamed up to celebrate women in the rail industry for International Women's Day on March 8th, with a host of activities across the Great Western network, including an exciting new film.

The film, entitled 'A Woman Belongs...' features the breadth and variety of roles now carried out by women from GWR, NR and BTP, in what have traditionally been seen as male dominated industries. From driving trains to working under them, as well as creative, and learning & development roles, the film is designed to showcase the different careers that the rail industry has to offer.

Along with the film, rail colleagues from across the network celebrated the day at Bristol Temple Meads station. There were stalls and activities designed to share women's experiences of working in rail, information on careers, as well as entertainment and refreshments.

Rail Companies Announce Support for Ukrainian Refugees

SWR issued the following statement on March 18th:

"To help Ukrainian nationals travelling to the UK, we are offering free onward travel on National Rail services to get you to a safe place.

"To make use of this scheme, you will need to show your Ukrainian passport and a boarding pass or ticket showing your arrival into the UK. The offer is valid across all train operators in England, Scotland and Wales, and you will have 48 hours from arrival in the UK to complete your journey.

As well as train operators, many bus and coach companies are also taking part in the scheme. Transport for London is also participating, so that if a journey requires travel between national rail stations in London, travellers can use London Underground/DLR services.

Jac Starr, Chief Executive Officer at the Rail Delivery Group, said:

"We have all been shocked by the tragedy unfolding in Ukraine. As an industry we know this is the right thing to do, making sure families affected by this tragedy can be reunited as quickly as possible, and helping others get to safety. Similar schemes have been launched on the continent, so I am proud that we are standing alongside our European Rail family and doing what we can to help."

Transport Secretary, Grant Shapps, added:

"We are working tirelessly to help Ukrainians travelling to Britain fleeing conflict. It is hugely welcome that the transport industry has come together to offer free rail, tram, bus and coach onward travel from any international port, airport or train station."

Details of the scheme, including a series of Frequently Asked Questions, can be found on SWR's website, at: southwesternrailway.com/train-tickets/ukrainian-refugee-free-travel-scheme

All the information on the website can be translated into Ukrainian using the accessibility tools at the top of the page. Alternatively, visit nationalrail.co.uk/ukraine

On-board Catering: A Tale of Two Cities

Readers may be intrigued to learn of the very different approach train operators across the country are taking to on-board dining. For instance, CrossCountry continues to offer a trolley service on most trains passing through our region. And as well its own trolley service, Transport for Wales has now re-introduced its famous onboard dining service on the Cardiff to Holyhead route (The Gerald), even increasing the service to three daily journeys in each direction.

Passengers with a first-class ticket can now enjoy complimentary hot and cold drinks and snacks such as biscuits, cakes and crisps along with some alternative healthy eating options. In addition to this, first-class passengers can order breakfast for £10, a two-course lunch or dinner for £17 and a three-course option for £20. These are charged in addition to the normal ticket price.

While SWR continue not to offer a trolley service on even their longest-distance routes, across the border at GWR as well as an at-seat trolley service, Pullman Dining is being restored to some of its long-distance routes.

This spring, Pullman Dining brought some special magic to Mother's Day travellers, with an event which included a Pullman brunch menu aboard the 10.30 from London Paddington to Bath Spa on 27th March.

A spokesperson for GWR said:

"Pullman Dining makes any journey special. Why not make it even more memorable by taking advantage of our special Pullman events, from special menus to delicious drinks offers. Pullman Dining really provides an experience you'll never forget."

"Whizz past beautiful views while you delight in high-quality seasonal ingredients and specially selected wines while you enjoy superb service from our friendly team of hosts. Our menu includes vegan and gluten-free options – there's truly something for all tastes."

This special Pullman Dining event was run in partnership with Visit Bath and a number of local attractions.

Passenger groups continue to raise the issue of on-board catering with SWR. In our February newsletter, we reported that the company had this to say about onboard catering:

"We have worked hard exploring options for the re-introduction of catering but, unfortunately, we couldn't find a workable solution. Therefore, we had to bring the contract with our provider to a close."

"We appreciate that this will have an impact, particularly on those travelling longer distances. While we don't have any concrete plans to re-introduce catering in the medium term, we're exploring how we may do so in the future in a way that provides best value for customers and the taxpayer. In the meantime, we still have various high-quality outlets available on our stations."

No-one expects a Pullman-style service, or the locally sourced delights of the Welsh-themed menus aboard The Gerald. But passengers are likely to continue to seek assurances from SWR that at some point an on-board trolley service, no matter how basic, will be restored to its Waterloo to Exeter and Waterloo to Weymouth routes.

A Rare Sighting at Honiton

February 28th saw this unusual visitor to the East Devon Line. The photograph was taken at Exhibition Way Overbridge between Pinhoe and Exmouth Junction by Dave Tozer.



A Colas Tamper DR 73913 worked an 1120 Chard Junction to Exeter and then on to Westbury. Its arrival at Honiton led to the 1155 departure to Waterloo being re-routed to Platform 2.

Thankfully, Justin was on duty in the ticket office, so made regular announcements to passengers to tell them to move platforms, as the information screen on Platform 1 was showing a message that the next train was not scheduled to stop and passengers should stand clear. This message only cleared when the Colas loco passed the down signal where it had been waiting for some time.

Unfortunately, by the time the screen showed a new message saying that the 1155 would now leave from Platform 2, the train had already gone!

Stop Press... Staff Absences On The Rise Again

Unfortunately, after a brief lull, the end of March saw the return of regular cancellations along our line due to crew illness/shortages, with short-notice cancellations affecting a range of services. As an example, on Friday March 25th the following services were cancelled, or revised, for the day:

0820 Waterloo to Exeter St. David's terminated at Salisbury;
0935 Exeter St. David's to Waterloo terminated at Salisbury;
1020 Waterloo to Exeter St. David's terminated at Yeovil Junction;
1220 Waterloo to Exeter St. David's terminated at Salisbury;
1225 Exeter St. David's to Waterloo started from Salisbury and terminated at Basingstoke;
1310 Yeovil Junction to Waterloo terminated at Salisbury;
1425 Exeter St. David's to Waterloo started from Salisbury;
1620 Waterloo to Exeter St. David's started from Basingstoke;
1625 Exeter St. David's to Waterloo started from Salisbury (a key afternoon peak service)
1650 Waterloo to Westbury started from Salisbury;
1750 Waterloo to Yeovil Pen Mill terminated at Salisbury.