Stations in Bloom 2024

The Friends of Honiton - July 2024

Welcome to Stations in Bloom 2024 at Honiton Station. Last year ended with the successful completion of the second phase of our artwork project, with a ceremony at the station where we met with some of our key partners to unveil some exciting pieces of art and to celebrate the continued progress of all that we have been doing to enhance our station. As 2024 continues, we are working with our industry partners to develop the station even further as an art hub, as well as to maintain the quality of the planting around the station, supported by the local charities who have adopted the planters and whose work we promote at the station.

Photograph by Vernon Whitlock

Great Celebrations as 2023 Art Project Comes to a Successful Conclusion

We were delighted to welcome so many of our friends and partners to celebrate the official unveiling of the new artwork and town map at Honiton station.

The wonderful artwork and town map were unveiled at the station on Wednesday 13th December, with the map unveiled by the Mayor of Honiton, Councillor Helen Hurford, accompanied by Deputy Mayor Tony McCollum and Town Councillors Jenny Brown and Steve Craddock.

in a project led by the Friends of Honiton Station, attractive new artwork has been installed on the inside of the station's footbridge and a shed on Platform 1.

In addition, an illustrated town map has been placed in the station forecourt.

The project was the brainchild of Friends' member and East Devon and Honiton Town Councillor Jenny Brown.

Honiton Primary School pupils created the new artwork on the station footbridge during workshops with artist Alistair Lambert at Thelma Hulbert Gallery (THG), Honiton Museum and the Blackdown Hills National Landscape.

The workshops were part of THG's Honiton Hippo project for the national Wild Escape campaign. Local families also created animals to add to the artwork during workshops at the gallery and in the St. Paul's area of Honiton over the Easter holidays.

Local artist Brittany E Lakin created the artwork on both sides of the Platform 1 shed.

The £6,700 project has been made possible thanks to funding from South Western Railway, Honiton Town Council and grants organised by the Devon & Cornwall Rail Partnership from CrossCountry Trains and the Community Rail Development Fund, a joint initiative of the Department for Transport and the Community Rail Network.

Councillor Jenny Brown said:

"I am thrilled to see the unveiling of this vibrant, colourful artwork. This project would not have been possible without the strong partnership that has been created over the past few years with our stakeholders, who are always very receptive of our ideas!

"I hope as commuters and visitors to Honiton walk past it, they will take the time to enjoy these latest additions."

Martin Long, Chairman of the Friends of Honiton Station said:

"Honiton station is important to so many people, and we are very proud of it, and all that it tries to do. We believe that the station is the perfect venue to promote and develop community-based art. To that end, we have been delighted to work with a range of partners to bring even more exciting artwork to our station."

Councillor Eleanor Rylance, Chair of East Devon District Council, said:

"We are delighted to showcase the creativity of local young people and celebrate the remarkable natural environment which surrounds Honiton."

Paula Aldridge, Community Rail Manager for South Western Railway said:

"South Western Railway was delighted to support such a worthwhile project. It's very important for us that we work closely with the communities around our network to help them make their stations somewhere that both customers and residents can be proud of."

Richard Gibson, Stakeholder Manager West & Wales for CrossCountry, said:

"This community art really enhances the experience of using Honiton station, and we're delighted to have been one of its supporters. The train station is a gateway to each community and Honiton can be proud of what its users will now see."

The footbridge artwork collage was originally created as part of Thelma Hulbert Gallery's Honiton Hippo project during workshops held as part of the national Wild Escape Project led by the Art Fund in partnership with Honiton Primary School, Allhallows Museum and Blackdown Hills National Landscape.

Over the course of nine workshops led by the artist Alistair Lambert, 28 pupils from Years 4 and 5 at Honiton Primary took inspiration from the Allhallows Museum's collection of hippo fossils, THG's exhibition 'Paradise Found' and the nature surrounding the Blackdown Hills to create the collage. The Wild Escape project explored changes in natural landscapes, revealing stories and connections to nature, the creatures we coexist with and biodiversity in the UK.

The national Wild Escape campaign led by the Art Fund was inspired by Sir David Attenborough's 'Wild Isles' series. Primary school children aged between 7 and 11 were invited to be find a favourite animal in their local museum and be inspired to create an artwork.

Photographs by Dave Withey

Community Noticeboard Celebrates Local Charities

Huge thanks go to our member Paul Wilson, who has been working hard with local charities to develop the work we do in giving a voice to these vital organisations that do such great work in our community. Paul has created an expanded display of community notices, using additional space we have borrowed from the Devon and Cornwall Rail Partnership on the noticeboard sited in the station car park.

With this extra space, we have been able to advertise a much wider range of events being held locally, including fund-raisers organised by the Ferne Animal Sanctuary, Children's Hospice South West and the Sidmouth Inshore Lifeboat, an organisation which is not affiliated to the RNLI, but operates as a locally run and funded rescue service.

We also continue to support events held at our successful local community centre, The Beehive. In addition, we are happy to promote locally run events such as the Honiton Hill Rally, the Honiton Show, Market Charter Day, Hot Pennies and the town's annual Gate to Plate day.

Friends Seek SWR Permission for New Art Installations at Station

Members took the opportunity of the latest Coffee and Chat session at The Beehive last month to discuss plans for the next stage of our art project for the station. We are keen to develop further what has been achieved already, as well as to enhance another area on Platform 1.

There are two aspects to our latest plan. The first is to develop further the existing art shed. We would like to add new art works to the two front panels and to the front roof panel of the shed, which presently contains two large art works on the side panels. The new work might, for instance, be done by the same artist as the existing two panels, and would be created and attached in the same way, and hopefully installed by the same installer who we hired last time.

We have been exploring the idea of either featuring two figures, in the same style as one of the planters the artist did for us previously, or images of foliage and plants in a similar style to the artwork on the side panels.

The second aspect of the new project would be to turn the old ticket booth, presently used by SWR for storage and sited underneath the footbridge on platform 1, into a new art installation.

We would like to see it painted, in SWR two-tone livery, with the outer part of the front and the sides painted in the SWR blue, and the immediate surround of the door in the lighter colour used in the livery, imitating how the livery is used around the doors of the Class 159 units on our line.

The centre panel of the door would then be an artwork, representing figures as if either sitting at the table seat of a train, or waiting in the doorway of the train carriage waiting to get off. As before, the art work would be in the form of a vinyl, hopefully made and installed by the installer who did the murals on the footbridge.

Discussions are continuing, but we are delighted that SWR have approved our plans in principle, and has offered enthusiastic support for the actual painting of the ticket booth. This is a project we hope to see completed later in 2024.

In the meanwhile, we were delighted to welcomed Paula Aldridge, Community Rail Manager for SWR to the station in May, to see for herself the mural on the footbridge, and the existing art shed. We took the opportunity to discuss with her and with Richard Burningham of DCRP our plans for these potential new artworks.

Honiton's Hidden History to be Hidden No More

An exciting new project, telling some of the hidden history of our town, is set to link up with volunteers at Honiton Station. 'Telling Our Stories, Finding Our Roots' is a community heritage and oral history project which aims to find, share and celebrate the hidden histories of Devon's diverse and multicultural communities, past and present.

The organisers, Devon Development Education, say that: *"By uncovering new or hidden heritage stories, we aim to complete and to complicate the historical picture of Devon. Devon's history is often depicted in ways which ignore its diversity and imply that the county's past was 'all white Anglo-Saxon'. It wasn't. We aim to put more (and more complicated) histories back into the picture.*

"Through building an archive of contemporary oral history interviews we aim to preserve, share and celebrate the voices, stories, experiences, and memories of the wide range of people who live in Devon today."

The project is powered by communities. Throughout, it has involved local volunteers, local ideas, local spaces, and local voices. And we are delighted to find that the railway station potentially has a key role to play in this exciting project.

The Chairman of The Friends of Honiton Station, Martin Long, has met with the local co-ordinator, Jess Huffman, on several occasions, offering support with various tasks and publicising the project wherever possible.

He was very happy to learn in February, however, that the station is rapidly becoming a focal point for the research being done by the volunteers, as the place where most of the stories being told begin, as people arrive in the town. We have therefore begun discussions as to how the station can become more involved with the project, including:

- As a possible setting off point for a themed walking tour;
- As the site for a set of banners along the fence on platform 2 showing images from the project;
- As the site for a display, using the large community display board in the waiting room, which presently holds the display on the history of the station.

The project has already identified a range of stories that it is following up. These include:

The Romany Gypsy Community, including gravestones at St Michael's Churchyard;

The Nepalese and Turkish families living and running businesses here;

The Honiton Lace Industry, its Flemish and Italian influences, its presence at the Great Exhibition of 1851 and the possible slave trade links;

The Roman military site, stories of forts, marching camps, temples & pottery;

Fijian and Black American Serviceman based at Dunkeswell Airfield WWII, which was constructed by, along others, Irish migrants. Construction material for the base arrived by train;

The Ugandan Asian refugees that were housed in Honiton in 1972.

Newsletter Celebrates Its 50th Issue

This year we celebrated the publication of the 50th issue of our newsletter. When we began this project during the first Covid lockdown in the Spring of 2020, we never anticipated the central role that it would come to play in our work, nor the range of stories we would end up covering.

South Western Railway wrote to us on the occasion, with Andrew Ardley, Regional Development Manager (West), saying:

"It is hard to believe that there have already been 50 Friends of Honiton Station newsletters! It is always a really good and interesting read and one I look forward to receiving.

"We at SWR are so grateful for the work that The Friends of Honiton Station do to help promote the station and just as importantly invest time and effort in making the station attractive and interesting for both our staff and customers in conjunction with other partners such as Honiton Town Council. It makes our job so much easier when we have really great partners like you to work with and we look forward to continuing to do so for many years to come.

"Things are on the up for Honiton and the West of England line generally with a continued growth in patronage and a new General Manager. There's lots of work going on in the background developing plans for short and long term improvements and we look forward to working with The Friends of Honiton Station to achieve these and make the most of the opportunities that arise from them."

How different everything looked when the world locked down in 2020, and we were unable to meet as a group, or even just to visit the station to carry out any activities. We were then advised to find ways to keep in touch with each other, both to support ourselves during a uniquely stressful time, but also to keep the group informed and involved in the work going on in the background to support the railway.

At first, it had just been a matter of sending rather random emails to members as and when there was news to tell or information to pass on. It soon became apparent that this would be much more effective and attractive if it was turned into a colour publication which people would hopefully look forward to receiving. The result was what became 'The Train at Platform 1', our monthly newsletter.

The first issue was basically a simple news sheet, enlivened with some photographs. Bit by bit, this grew into a 16-page colour newsletter, put together using Apple Pages, and then saved as a pdf file before being sent out to members.

When Charles Pegman developed our excellent website, the newsletter began to appear there instead, where members and the wider community could read the newsletter directly, using an online reader. There is also an archive of all 50 editions of the newsletter on the website to download.

As regular readers will have noticed, we have covered a wide range of stories over the last four years. Great sources for content are the Community Rail Network's fortnightly mailing, and the Media Centres on South Western Railway, GWR and Network Rail's websites.

Stories from elsewhere can often highlight local issues, and news stories closer to home provide an interesting read for members. We regularly highlight our plans for the year ahead, give feedback on our successful campaigns or activity, and report on important meetings, such as those of Station Adoption Chairs. We also provide a regular Engineering Report, explaining planned work taking place on our line in the following two months.

Recent highlights have included the unveiling of the outstanding artwork at the station, reports of our successes in the Stations in Bloom festival and news of the constantly unfolding story of campaigns to improve the railway line between Honiton and Exeter. Less happily, we have also reported on the seemingly endless stream of strikes which have blighted our industry for so long.

During its run of 50 issues, the newsletter has included information about heritage excursions, special reports from guest writers, railway-themed quizzes and even a jokes page.

Early issues of the newsletter included a guest star, someone who members of our group have heard about but, due to lockdown, had no chance to meet. Guests set a quiz, or told us a little bit about themselves. We shared something of what they do in their spare time, even what football team they support. It was all about personalising these key people, who do so much to support the work we do.

A key feature of the newsletter are the photographs, often submitted by members. As well as illustrating the story for readers, these photographs can be a useful way of keeping in touch with the station for those who are unable to visit the station themselves.

We are grateful for everyone who sends us photographs for the newsletter. And we are also pleased to receive articles and short pieces from members and supporters, relevant to our work. This newsletter belongs to everyone, and it is great that so many people contribute to it.

Commenting on the 50th issue, Richard Burningham MBE, Manager, Devon And Cornwall Rail Partnership, said:

"Congratulations to The Friends of Honiton Station on this, the 50th newsletter; a great milestone.

"The Friends have achieved much over the last few years including Jenny Brown's great idea of the promotional vinyls in the waiting shelter, the history booklet and display to mark the 160th anniversary of the station opening, the fabulous community artwork and planting projects, the town map and community noticeboards.

"It's been great to see, and throughout we here at the Devon And Cornwall Rail Partnership have done all we can to support this local vision, aspiration and energy. For Honiton projects, we have been able to obtain funding from South Western Railway, the Community Rail Development Fund, a joint initiative of the Department for Transport and the Community Rail Network and CrossCountry Trains' Community Engagement Fund. I'm looking forward to helping with future projects, and I know those who have provided funding for earlier initiatives have been delighted with the results."

Richard went on to say:

"Bottom line, it's your railway and your station. It's really important to encourage local people to get involved in working together with the rail industry and others, like ourselves, to make the most of both the railway itself and the station for the benefit of all. That's what happening at Honiton thanks to the Friends.

"Making the most of the railway includes working to attract visitors by train to local events and spend money in the town's shops, cafes, pubs etc. Making the most of the station can take many forms but, at heart, it's about local pride, the station as a gateway to the community and getting together to provide the best experience possible for both local people using the station and those visiting by train.

"None of this is possible without volunteers who give up their time to make a difference. So far, so very good at Honiton and my thanks to all involved. Long may it continue."

Among other the greetings we received on the occasion of the 50th issue of the newsletter was one from Jack Wharton, Senior Public Affairs Manager at Network Rail, who wrote:

"On behalf of everyone at Network Rail, we would like to thank you for all that you do in making the railway a better place. Honiton railway station is a beautiful station, full of art and character and that is down to the great efforts of you all. Thank you."

Bruce Duncan, Chairman of the Salisbury to Exeter Rail Users Group, said:

"Today's railway often ignores passengers, so it is critical that groups like the Friends of Honiton Station communicate with the users of their railway. FOHS does this brilliantly, and with one of the best newsletters I have seen.

"So, from all of us at SERUG, congratulations and please do keep up your excellent work."

Before he left for pastures new, Dan Wright, our Support Officer at Community Rail Network wrote:

"It has been such a pleasure seeing Honiton develop into such a good example of a station connected to its community. Keep up the good work and best of luck in the future."

Local Rail Ale Trail Launched in Honiton Pub

A new promotion was launched last month to encourage people from near and far to visit local pubs by train. The launch came during a visit to Honiton by Paula Aldridge, Community Rail Manager for SWR, and Richard Burningham, Manager of the Devon and Cornwall Rail Partnership.

The Salisbury to Exeter Rail Ale Trail includes 19 pubs along the railway that links the two cities, all of them within easy reach of the stations in the towns and villages it serves. One of the pubs included is the Vine Inn and Tearoom in Honiton, a short walk from Honiton station. The Devon launch of the Rail Ale Trail was held there on Wednesday 15th May.

The Salisbury to Exeter Rail Ale Trail has been organised by the Devon & Cornwall Rail Partnership and Blackmore Vale Community Rail Partnership working with South Western Railway. It joins a family of Rail Ale Trails for branch lines in Devon and Cornwall run by the Devon & Cornwall Rail Partnership.

Details of the new Rail Ale Trail can be found, with all the others, at railaletrail.com where there is also a special Stamp Sheet to print out.

At each participating pub, 'Trailers' can collect a stamp when buying a drink by showing their stamp sheet and train ticket.

Once they have collected ten stamps, ‘Trailers’ can claim a free special Rail Ale Trail t-shirt by sending the stamped sheet and rail ticket to the Devon & Cornwall Rail Partnership. One of the stamps can be for having a meal at the pub.

Paula Aldridge, Community Rail Manager for South Western Railway said:

“We’re delighted to be involved with such an imaginative way to explore the railway network in a beautiful part of the country while supporting some of the small and independent businesses which are the lifeblood of their local communities.”

Richard Burningham, Manager of the Devon & Cornwall Rail Partnership said:

“The Salisbury – Exeter Rail Ale Trail is all about encouraging people to explore the places served by the line and to visit local pubs, thereby helping the local economy.”

Derek Beer, Chairman of Blackmore Vale CRP said:

“The Rail Ale trail gives another really good incentive for locals and visitors to explore our towns and villages and enjoy a decent drink and bite to eat at the same time. Our pubs and Inns are the heart of our rural towns and villages, and a visit so often unlocks a host of local information and history.

“It is quite an exciting adventure to set out on the train without the worry of ‘going over the limit’ and being environmentally sound as well. The T shirt that is the reward for visiting all on the trail is really good quality and a great souvenir. It’s the first time that we have done anything like this, and it’s great to be doing it with the Devon and Cornwall Rail Partnership, and when adventurers have completed ours, they might like to take the train further West to explore even more delights.”