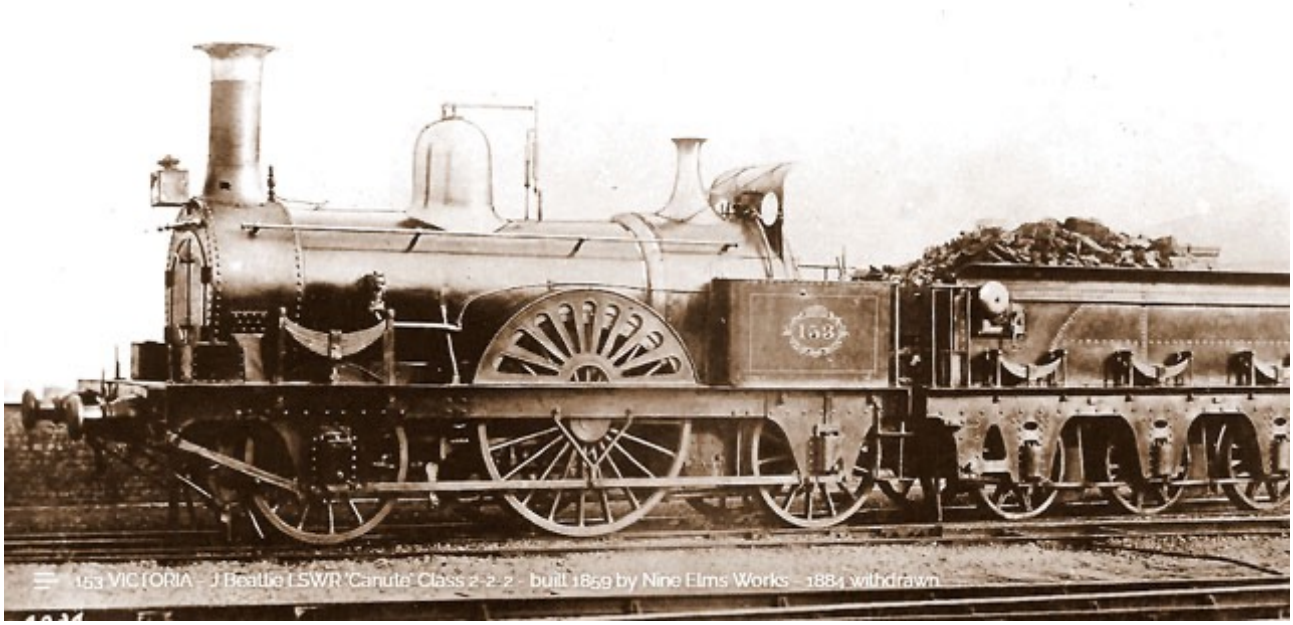
The Train at Platform 1

The Friends of Honiton Station Newsletter 61 - April 2025

Welcome to the April newsletter, which marks the fifth birthday of this regular publication. So much has changed since we first created this newsletter as a a way of keeping in touch with members during the first pandemic lockdown. Over the last five years, we have enjoyed bringing members, supporters and visitors to our website all the latest local rail news, as well as keeping everyone up to date with the work of The Friends of Honiton Station. As we continue to mark Railway 200, the newsletter will continue to spread the word about the vital future of our railways.



Photograph: Victoria, an early locomotive used on the London and South Western Railway

Railway 200 Touring Train to Visit Waterloo

A new and unique exhibition train will visit London Waterloo Station on July 18th and 19th, as part of Railway 200, the national celebration of the 200th anniversary of the modern railway. This coincides with the anniversary of the opening of the line through Honiton in 1860.

The touring train, named Inspiration, is due to open to the public on 27th June at the Severn Valley Railway and is expected to visit 60 locations across England, Scotland and Wales over 12 months up to Summer 2026, creating a buzz of interest and excitement at mainline stations, heritage railways and rail freight sites. Curated in partnership with the National Railway Museum, it will be the only exhibition train on the rail network and will promote the past, present and future of the railway, helping to attract the next generation of pioneering talent.

Sporting an eye-catching livery, Inspiration will comprise four smartly reconfigured Mark 3 coaches, procured by Network Rail. The mobile Railway 200 exhibition is designed to inspire schoolchildren and others to consider a career in rail, shining a spotlight on the wide range of roles available, and to create a more diverse workforce.

Rail's innovation and pioneering pedigree will be explored in a 'Railway Firsts' coach, highlighting landmark moments in the development of the railway. Alongside will be a 'Wonderlab on Wheels', inviting visitors to test their engineering skills with a range of interactive exhibits. This will adjoin a carriage called 'Your Railway Future', showcasing some of the more hidden roles in rail and encouraging people to consider a career in rail to shape the next 200 years. There will also be a 'Partner Zone', offering free, flexible exhibition space.

The carriages, which are currently being fitted out, are supported by a £250k grant from The National Lottery Heritage Fund. The train will be operated by GB Railfreight.

More than 200,000 people, including many schoolchildren, are expected to visit by prior booking. Admission to the train will be free, but normal entry charges to heritage railways and private sites where it is located will apply. Bookings will open shortly after Easter.

Further details of later venues will be announced as local arrangements and the complex train planning process progress, say Network Rail. The train will visit all English regions, Scotland and Wales.

A virtual tour of the exhibition experience is planned for those who are unable to visit.

On **Sunday 20th April and Monday 21st April**, Yeovil Railway Centre will celebrate Railway 200 by holding an Easter weekend event. Passengers will travel on the Peckett 0-4-0 'Pectin' riding along the 1/3rd mile of the ex-Great Western Railway Clifton Maybank branch. Other planned attractions include the Easter Bunny and Easter Egg Hunt, Model Railway, Miniature Railway and exhibits and displays (including the Chard Signalling Panel).

In May, the Swanage Railway celebrates the 140th anniversary of its opening with a number of activities building up to the anniversary on the 20th. This will include a special gala and re-enactments of the opening day as well as the involvement of local schools.

Station Vandalised in Spray Paint Attack

It was extremely disappointing and frustrating that the station suffered a daytime graffiti attack on March 17th. Understandably, the station staff have been left upset by this incident.

Large areas of the station were daubed with white spray-painted lettering, including the fence at the Axminster end of platform 1, parts of the electrical boxes, the undecorated front of the green storage shed and one of the new seats. Three areas outside the station, on the footpath up the front steps and near the railway bridge, were also affected.

The damage was been fully documented and reported, including to the British Transport Police. What is remarkable, and very hard to explain, is that the damage was caused between 11 a.m. and 12 Noon, at a time when the station is open and usually quite busy with passengers (Indeed the Chairman had only left the station on a train at 10.55).

The electrical boxes and shed were quickly cleaned, but it is not known when work to try to remedy the damage to the fence will be undertaken.

It is not easy to remove spray paint, and may prove a tricky job. We will update members with more information as and when we get it.

We are grateful to the Station manager for all his hard work in trying to address this. We are also grateful for the many kind messages of support we have received from across the rail industry.

The week ended with the station affected by a power cut, which caused the ticket office to be closed. National Grid was quickly on site to deal with the outage.

Editor's Note:

You will notice that I have not included a photograph of the vandalism to accompany this story. Frankly, I have no intention of giving any more attention to those individuals who caused this damage than I really have to.

Engineering Report: Including Forthcoming Work

During the last couple of months, a great deal of vegetation near the track between Exeter and Honiton has been cleared. Trees were also cut down behind Platform 2 (except one in which birds were already nesting). In addition, a number of bridges have been inspected, including the New Street bridge. This last inspection required a road closure on Monday March 10th.

Engineers came from London and Portsmouth in order to carry out the five-yearly inspection of the structure, with particular attention being paid, they said, to the area where the metal structure of the bridge sits on the brick element.

As well as the road closure, the inspection required that the line be closed for a short time, while the engineers checked the structure at track level. However, this work was carried out between train departures, so that passengers were not inconvenienced unnecessarily.

Some members have noted that a number of websites that show track layouts have recently been stating that the bay platform at Exeter Central Station is out of use. This has significance for us, as sometimes West of England Line services are terminated at Central, and then often use the bay.

Network Rail initially reported that as far as they are concerned the platform is still *"an operational platform and mostly used for stabilising trains or in emergencies."*

Upon further enquiry, a spokesperson for Network Rail Western told us that:

"On some routine maintenance recently we found some problems with some cables in the area affecting the bay platform. The work to complete the repair is quite complex and demanding of access which needs to be planned in. The impact to our customers is small with the one train of the week booked to use it being accommodated with an alternative plan which the customer is happy with.

"The platform is not out of use. Should we want to use it in an unplanned state, we can do that yet in a degraded mode. We are just not planning to use it unless we really need to due to the restricted signalling in place. Our SWR colleagues are aware of this and are working with us to fix as soon as reasonably practicable."

Shortly after we received this message, an SWR service was duly terminated at Central , using Platform 1 rather than the bay. This caused several GWR services to be delayed while the platform was occupied.

We were amused by the note attached to the Track Diagram for the platform by our friends to the Exeter Panel Box on one occasion, which used the "code" ILLB BACK

Saturday 5th and Sunday 6th April, Sunday 13th April

The lines between Salisbury and Yeovil Junction will be closed all weekend due to maintenance work.

London Waterloo to Exeter St Davids services will be revised.

Some services will be diverted between Salisbury and Yeovil Junction via Westbury and some services will terminate at Salisbury.

Buses will run between Salisbury and Yeovil Junction via Tisbury.

A revised service will run between Yeovil Junction and Exeter St Davids.

Sunday 4th and Monday 5th May

The lines in the Basingstoke area will be closed all day Sunday and Monday due to maintenance work.

London Waterloo to Exeter St Davids services will start from Andover and will call additionally at Grateley.

Buses will run between Woking and Andover via Basingstoke. London Waterloo to Basingstoke stopping services will not run.

A revised service will run between London Waterloo and Woking.

Sunday 11th May

The lines in the Salisbury area will be closed all day due to maintenance work.

London Waterloo to Exeter services will start from Gillingham.

A revised service will run between London Waterloo and Andover. These services will not call at Woking.

Buses will run between Andover and Gillingham via Salisbury.

Saturday 17th May

The lines between Clapham Junction and Barnes will be closed all day due to maintenance work.

Queenstown Road station will be closed all day. Please use other nearby stations.

Due to the diverted services, some services via Wimbledon will be revised.

London Waterloo to Exeter services will depart London Waterloo earlier than normal.

Sunday 25th May

The lines in the Raynes Park area will be closed all day due to maintenance work.

London Waterloo to Exeter St Davids services will be revised. Some services will start from Basingstoke.

London Waterloo to Basingstoke stopping services will start from Woking and will run hourly.

Devon Rail Forum Hints at Timetable Review

March saw the latest Devon Rail Forum meeting. It was attended by our good friend David Mansfield. Among the updates during the meeting was one from Andrew Ardley, the Regional Development Manager for SWR.

He reported that the transfer of SWR to government ownership is progressing, and is due to happen in May.

The Business Plan for2025/2026 was submitted to the Department for Transport in December; SWR is awaiting confirmations of budgets.

The service integration focus for 2025, he said, would be the Jurassic Coast (Sidmouth – Swanage) including,

- Sunday Axminster – Seaton / Beer bus link improvement / Honiton – Sidmouth / Axminster – Lyme Regis;
- Joint with D&C CRP and GWR setting example for joint TOC co-operation;
- Shelters, flags, station signing, new interactive totems;
- Combined promotional campaign including upgraded JCBT website, through tickets / journey planning.

New passenger information systems for our Class 159 diesel fleet have been approved for installation this year alongside C6 exams. This will hopefully end the farcical situation when westbound trains from Honiton are still showing onboard screens announcing that the next station is Tisbury…

SWR revenue growth continues to be strong, as is growth on the West of England Line. Performance improvement now stabilising, he said, with exceptions on some individual days (as local passengers are all too aware).

Andrew announced a timetable re-cast is due for 2026. When questioned about this, he said that the main driver for this is improving train service performance. It is a long time since the last one, he said, and there is also the need to reflect changes in loadings and travel patterns since then, and particularly since the Pandemic.

The recast sought to simplify things and make best use of rolling stock and train crew. He pointed out when questioned that SWR is very aware of the risk that any East Devon passing loop being planned could be in the wrong place following the recast. He added that what will help mitigate this risk is that the West of England Line is usually first on the timetable planning graph because of the line’s complexities.

Andrew went on to report that the bogie supply issue we reported on in a recent newsletter has now been resolved. He added that Variable Rate Sanding equipment is now installed on diesel fleet – autumn periods are a key focus for its use.

As to station improvements in 20525/2626, Andrew noted that Feniton Station will see work on access, the waiting room and to car park lining. Axminster is due for whole station painting, and Whimple is due for work on its platform benches.

There has been another attempt recently to paint two of the older benches here at Honiton. However, the work done has only covered up the underlying faults with at least one of them. Hopefully, eventually they will be replaced eventually, to match the other new benches installed a couple of years ago. Andrew reported that the station is due a complete repaint during 2025/2026.

The key topic for us in terms of SWR's is Strategic Planning is the Strategic Outline Business Case for Devon Metro. Network Rail is developing its economic analysis and drawing up potential costings for infrastructure, and SWR and GWR are reviewing operational costs and timetable options.

The aim is to have the SOBC finished by the end of Spring this year. However, further progress to the Outline Business Case stage is subject to a bid to East Devon District Council's CIL funds.

We are grateful to David for attending this meeting on behalf of SERUG and us.

Local Residents Able to Register for Engineering Work Alerts

Local residents who live near to the railway are set to benefit from a new digital service that will let people know about upcoming railway engineering work, emergency work and get updates about current maintenance and upgrade projects in 'real-time'.

Line side neighbours living within 500m of a railway line across Network Rail's Wessex route are encouraged to sign up to this new email service by visiting their website at: www.networkrail.co.uk/railworknearme

This free opt-in service will keep people up-to-date with the latest information about any works going on in their neighbourhood, especially those that might cause a disturbance, providing details in a clear, accessible and timely way.

This is part of a wider national initiative that will benefit Network Rail's 25 million neighbours nationwide.

Spanning 20,000 miles of track, 30,000 bridges and viaducts, and thousands of level crossings and signals and stations, the railway infrastructure touches every corner of Britain. Essential works not only impact the millions who travel by rail daily, but also millions of line side neighbours. Letters will still be used for those not able to access on-line systems.

Mark Goodall, Network Rail's Wessex Route Director, said:

"I'm delighted that we're rolling out this new service for our lineside neighbours across the Wessex route and strongly encourage people to sign up. We're committed to keeping the communities we serve up to date on any planned or emergency work and this free digital notification service will undoubtedly play a key role in complementing the existing ways we communicate.

"The new scheme also has the added benefit of saving the railway £1.65 per print letter – funds that instead can be reinvested elsewhere on the network."

Sarah Sanders, Head of Contact and Community at Network Rail, said:

"We are working hard providing as much notice as possible about our projects, whether its general maintenance or engineering upgrades. Our digital notification system is a step-change in the way we engage with our communities and neighbours as part of our vision to deliver a simpler, better, greener railway."

The rollout follows a successful pilot scheme in 2023 across a selection of projects, including the Midland Main Line upgrade and Bolton to Wigan electrification scheme, with 207,114 notifications sent to neighbours with a saving of £362,988.

Replacement Trains to Help GWR Improve Reliability in Devon

Later this year, Great Western Railway (GWR) will welcome 26 Class 175 trains to its fleet to help improve punctuality and reliability for customers, replacing older diesel trains that are more expensive and less environmentally friendly to run.

The move marks the first stage of the train operator's plans to rejuvenate its regional and suburban services while preparing the way for decarbonisation.

The 10 two-car trains and 16 three-car trains are expected to start to enter service in Devon and Cornwall later this year, with the entire fleet expected to be operational from the end of next year.

Able to be connected in four, five and six-car formations, the trains will operate predominantly on the line between Exeter St Davids and Penzance, as well as to Barnstaple and Okehampton.

The Class 175s will release trains to improve performance in other areas of the network. This boost to the fleet will lead to the removal of some of its oldest and least efficient diesel trains, which, say GWR, have become more expensive to maintain as spare parts become more difficult to find on the open market.

GWR Managing Director, Mark Hopwood, said:

"The benefits of these trains will be felt by customers across the whole of the GWR network. With more trains we will have more scope to increase resilience where it is needed most, delivering the reliability our communities deserve and need. They are a fantastic addition to our fleet and will provide a welcome boost as we seek to rejuvenate our regional and suburban services."

In the run-up to service launch, GWR will undertake a comprehensive programme of training for staff, as well as preparing Laira depot, where the trains will be maintained.

This move puts proposals by SWR to replace the existing Class 159 stick on the West of England Line into even sharper focus.

As we reported in a recent newsletter, SWR is in discussions with the Department of Transport about converting part of its Desiro fleet to run partly on third-rail electric traction and partly on batteries.

Along with the creation of "islands" of third-rail along part of the route, this would allow the removal of diesel traction from the West of England Line at some point in the 2030s, before the more permanent replacement of the stock in around 2045.

However, as we also reported previously, there are serious objections to overcome in extending the third-rail system, and technical issues to overcome in extending the range of existing battery technology for use in this way.

New Discoveries Unearth Hidden History of Salisbury Station

Last year, we reported that work at Salisbury Station had uncovered an abandoned tunnel beneath the station. Network Rail and South Western Railway engineers have now discovered further tunnels and rooms.

The discovery of this secret world beneath the station came about as part of the ongoing £5.3m station forecourt upgrades which will see the front of the station significantly transformed.

When doing drainage checks, an old phone box to the right immediately outside the station entrance was moved, revealing sleepers that, once lifted, uncovered a dark and hidden tunnel leading underneath the station.

Naturally intrigued, engineers ventured underground and found a labyrinth of tunnels and rooms, and are now hoping to uncover its origins and purpose as part of a larger effort to delve into the historical infrastructure beneath the railway station.

The tunnel leads beneath platform 4, opening into a curious area with a side room on the right. The primary chamber beneath the platform features a striking architectural detail, with sections of rail repurposed as structural supports for the ceiling, reflecting the ingenuity of railway engineers from a bygone era. Remnants of old signal equipment have also been uncovered, crafted from timber and showing the passage of time. These artefacts provide a glimpse into the station's operational past.

Further studies have uncovered that the tunnel once played a role in the station's logistical operations. When trains were equipped with guard's vans, barrels of beer and cider were transported to other stations and unofficial trade, such as the collection of eggs from stations like Whitchurch, took place.

Beer and cider were also sold and served at the station, although referred to as 'refreshments' rather than a bar. In earlier times, green hatch doors were used at the tunnel entrance, and planks were installed along the steps, allowing beer barrels to be rolled down with ropes. Eventually, these hatch doors were replaced entirely by planks and sleepers, which remain today.

Occasionally, Christmas trees were gathered from the line side near Grateley for sale to the public. These were collected using tools originally intended for removing minor track obstructions.

Additionally, the twin rollers found stored on site were part of an old signalling system, designed to guide the points that allow the trains to switch tracks.

Salisbury station occupied a much larger footprint in the city than it does today with the old Great Western Railway platforms still in place behind the South Western Railway depot. The old GWR station building is now a social club for members.

Platform 1 contains a building that is no longer in passenger use and features a map from the pre-Beeching era. A room leading to a ladder that goes under the station has also been discovered, with this room yet to be explored, leading to more questions about the station's history.

Commenting on the discoveries, Steve Kelly, Network Rail Asset Engineer, said:

"This was one of the most interesting discoveries during my career on the railway. It just goes to show that no two days are the same in this industry. The tunnel's origins and purpose have become a topic of fascination, linking modern development with historical exploration. The tunnel offered a rare look into the hidden layers of the railway's history, preserving a snapshot of the site's legacy."

Anna Jipps, Company Secretary for the Railway Heritage Trust, said:

"Discoveries like this prove that there is more to discover about our railway history and make it a fascinating industry to be involved in. We're intrigued by the tunnel, but on consulting with experts, we're still no longer clearer to fully understanding where it leads to. It's an exciting part of Salisbury's railway heritage and we're keen to learn more. If you feel you can help with this, be it from a historical perspective or an engineering one, please do get in touch."

Daniel Holmes, Salisbury flagship Station Manager for South Western Railway, added:

"This is a beautiful building with a lot of heritage and history. For me, it's hugely important we get everyone involved. I want to make sure everyone knows about the importance of Salisbury and the history around it, so it's been great being able to do that and share it with so many different people."

Pancakes to Paddington: Flipping Fantastic Treat for GWR Customers

In what had to be the fastest-cooked pancakes in the South West, a special ‘Pancakes to Paddington’ service saw Great Western Railway customers tucking in to tasty pancakes cooked and delivered to their seats at 125mph.

GWR is renowned for its Pullman dining service, but on Shrove Tuesday this year Pullman chef Martin Tyrrell was showcasing his flipping fantastic skills in the kitchen of an Intercity Express Train.

In a batter-filled bid to put smiles on passengers’ faces, the 0915 service from Plymouth to London Paddington saw onboard colleagues dishing out pancakes filled with classic sugar and lemon or dripping in maple syrup.

GWR Sales and Marketing Director, Amanda Burns, said:

“Thousands of our customers get to sample our Pullman dining service each year, enjoying mouth-watering dishes while cruising through stunning countryside. Today was about inspiring travel while celebrating Shrove Tuesday.

“Whether you’re a commuter, a leisure traveller, or just a pancake enthusiast, we hope we were able to sprinkle a little extra joy to your journey.”

Work Begins on New Okehampton Station

March saw work begin on the new Okehampton Interchange Station. Part of the work involved moving the track into a new position to enable construction to start on the new station. 300 metres of the single-line track was moved 90cm north to allow a new platform to be built alongside it. The previous track layout didn’t allow for a platform to be built that meets regulations for new stations.

The railway reopened on Saturday morning (15 March) after seven days of round-the-clock work. The track was cut and lifted away and ballast (track stone) was excavated before adjustments to the track bed were made. New track and 20 concrete sleepers were then installed in the new alignment and 1,000 tonnes of ballast laid and compacted.

Two new chambers were installed under the track for drainage and 300 tonnes of stone laid to allow water to flow away from the railway.

Work now continues to build the platform and a 200-space car park. The next major stage of work takes place in summer when a footbridge and lift shaft will be lifted into place. When the station opens in 2026, the bridge will provide access from the car park to the platform.

Melanie Harvey, GWR's Station Manager for Mid Devon, said:

"New stations such are vital in bringing the railway closer to people as we become mindful of the need to live and travel more sustainably - something we can see so visibly with the success of the reopening of Okehampton in November 2021.

"We're really pleased to be able to start work on this new station, as well as support Network Rail as they continue their essential maintenance of the line."

West Devon Borough Council's Lead Member for Built Environment, Councillor Caroline Mott, said:

"Network Rail has moved quickly to finish this first major stage of its work for the Okehampton Interchange. It's really pleasing to already see the visible signs of the station taking shape. With the trains back running, and our plans very much on track, we're looking forward to the next milestone in this exciting project which will bring huge benefits for the East of Okehampton and beyond."

Photograph: Work begins on Okehampton Interchange: Credit Network Rail

During the week long line closure, Network Rail took the opportunity to carry out repairs to bridges in the Crediton area, as well as to undertake essential maintenance elsewhere along the Tarka and Dartmoor lines. Two bridges were repaired to ensure the railway remains safe for decades to come.

Heart of Wessex Line Improvements Continue

Later in March, train services on the Heart of Wessex Line were disrupted, with no trains running between Yeovil Pen Mill and Castle Cary for a week, while Network Rail complete vital improvements to the railway in the Yeovil area.

While the railway was closed, Network Rail's team of engineers replaced 850 tonnes of ballast, the stone supporting a 250-metre stretch of track. This work is crucial to prevent the track bed from becoming flooded, which can lead to failures and rough rides.
During this time, engineers took advantage of the line being closed to complete a range of other important work, including:

- Carrying out repairs to the semaphore signals at Yeovil Pen Mill station to reduce the risk of failures;
- Cutting down and removing dead, diseased and dangerous trees in the Yeovil area to reduce the risk of trees blocking the line and leaf fall onto the railway too allow trains to run safely and on time;
- Track maintenance in the Maiden Newton area to ensure smooth and reliable journeys, including tamping – where engineers use a tamping machine to lift the track slightly and pack new ballast under the sleepers, before it realigns the track using laser measurement.

Mark Goodall, Wessex Route Director for Network Rail, said:

"While there is never a good time to close the railway, we have worked incredibly hard to minimise the disruption for passengers.

"This work is vital to ensuring this part of the network is strong for the years to come. Once completed, passengers will benefit from a more reliable journey between Yeovil and Castle Cary."

Network Rail has made a significant investment over the last four years to improve the reliability of the Heart of Wessex Line, which connects Weymouth with Bristol.

This ongoing improvement project started in 2020 with the replacement of a bridge at Yetminster, followed by improvement works at Yeovil Pen Mill Station and the replacement of four miles of track between Maiden Newton and Yetminster in 2021. Over 2022, the track around Yetminster was replaced and the signal box and Yeovil Pen Mill was overhauled.

During 2023, engineers replaced railway around Thornford station as well as replacing track between Maiden Newton and Chetnole. Most recently, the line was closed for a week in September 2024 for engineers to replace a mile of track between Thornford and Yeovil Pen Mill.

And in Other Rail News…

The Tarka Line Bistro, a newly reopened independent café at Eggesford Station, has reported a big boost in patronage thanks to a video made by the Devon & Cornwall Rail Partnership (DCRP), promoting the café, the neighbouring farm shop and the scenic journey on the Tarka Line from Exeter.

The Bistro's Rebecca Lauder said:

"We've had an absolutely incredible response thanks to the video. People have come from as far afield as Dorset and Cullompton especially to see us - it's made us have a very busy start to 2025."

DCRP social media officer Betsy said:

"It's been great to see the impact of the video, supporting both the local economy and the railway. We've got plenty more videos planned for our Great Scenic Railways social media channels."

Meanwhile, part of its Railway 200 celebrations, Purbeck CRP facilitated a trip for a group of 13-18-year-olds to visit South Western Railway's Bournemouth TrainCare Depot.

Members of the Swanage Railway Sygnets – a programme providing young people with the opportunity to learn, volunteer and develop skills in railway operations – were guided around the depot by Dan Bennett and Sam Smith, full-time maintenance engineers and dedicated Swanage Railway volunteers.

The young people saw first-hand how today's trains are maintained and gained a better understanding of the different training and career options within the rail industry.

New Community Rail Network Support Worker Announced

Last month we welcomed Gary Shipp as our link person at Community Rail Network (CRN). He has recently taken on responsibility from Jenni Jones for supporting CRN members in Devon and Cornwall. (Jenni remains responsible for stations across Southern England).

As Projects Development Manager, Gary's role is to help members develop and deliver effective projects in key areas, by increasing ambition, opportunities and knowledge in community rail, sharing good practice, enabling replication and learning, bringing in wider expertise, and seeking to break down common challenges.

By managing this developing part of the support and development team, this role aims to advance and accelerate community rail activity and impact, especially in creating more sustainable, equitable, integrated transport and communities and enabling inclusive, accessible, healthy and socially valuable access to and use of rail and stations.

Gary enjoys walking, running, and cycling. He is currently completing the Southwest Coast Path in stages, using public transport to access the route.

Gary is relatively local to us, living near Totnes. So we look forward in due course to him visiting our station to see our work, and to discuss the future. In the meanwhile, the Chairman has sent him a message of welcome.

Sir Andrew Haines To Retire from Network Rail

At the end of March, it was announced that Sir Andrew Haines, the popular Chief Executive of Network Rail, has decided to retire from the company in October. Sir Andrew joined Network Rail in August 2018. During his seven years as Chief Executive, he has maintained a relentless focus on putting passengers first to make Network Rail a more customer-facing organisation and drive improved performance.

His leadership through the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic ensured the railways continued to run safely and efficiently for key workers and critical goods. Following the publication of the Plan for Rail in 2021, Andrew was tasked with establishing interim arrangements for the creation of Great British Railways. He has been a leading force in the work to date to bring track and train together to create an integrated railway with passengers at its heart.

Speaking on behalf of the Board, Network Rail's Acting Chair Mike Putnam said:

"Andrew has been an exceptional leader for Network Rail at a critical time in the history of Britain's railways. He has secured reforms that will lead to a more reliable railway, while maintaining a continual focus on safety and performance.

"His vision, leadership and ambition for an integrated, simpler railway that will deliver a significantly better experience for passengers has been at the heart of the creation of Great British Railways.

Heidi Alexander, Secretary of State for Transport, said:

"I'd like to thank Andrew for the commitment and leadership he's shown over the past seven years. He provided stability during the most challenging of periods and ensured the railway kept running throughout the pandemic and through national industrial action.

"His vision and support has been vital as we establish Great British Railways – one of this government's biggest reforms. His work has been a key part of our efforts to deliver a simpler, more efficient railway, with passengers at its heart."

Commenting on the announcement, Sir Andrew Haines commented:

"It has been a privilege to lead Network Rail through a time of such change and transformation for Britain's railways, and I am proud of the progress that we have made on performance, safety, reliability and customer service.

"After seven years as Chief Executive, as Great British Railways starts to progress through legislation and into implementation, I have decided it is the right time for me to retire.

"I am a passionate supporter of the principles behind Great British Railways and the once-in-a-generation opportunity it presents to create an integrated railway that delivers a better service and experience for passengers, stakeholders and colleagues. It has been a privilege to lead this transformational journey to date."

A formal succession process will begin shortly, led by the Nomination & Remuneration Committee of the Network Rail Board, but the appointment is subject to the approval of the Secretary of State.

Stop Press: Atlantic Coast Express 2025 Date Announced

As part of Railway 200 celebrations, we hoping to welcome the 2025 Atlantic Coast Express to Honiton on **Saturday August 16th.**

This classic rail steam-hauled rail journey will once again be run by the Norfolk-based Railway Touring Company, following part the route of the old Atlantic Coast Express (ACE) that ran from London to the seaside resorts of Devon and Cornwall in South West England.

The excursion will leave London Waterloo steam hauled in the morning and make its way to Exeter where there will be a break to visit the historic city centre. The return route will be via Bristol, Bath and Salisbury back to London Waterloo.

Departing from London Waterloo, the train will thread our way steam hauled through the west London suburbs towards Woking and Basingstoke, where there will be stops to pick up passengers. It will continue to follow the London & South Western Railway's main line to Salisbury and Exeter, following the route of the old ACE expresses.

Arriving Exeter at around 1330, we expect the train to reach Honiton at around 12.30, leaving at about 12.55.

Steam haulage options are presently unknown. Lan line, the usual locomotive is not presently booked for this service, according to their website.

Coffee and Conversation - A Reminder

The next Coffee and Conversation session for members will be at 11 a.m. on **Monday April 14th** at The Beehive Café in Honiton.

I hope that as many members as possible will be able to join us for some lively chat and a chance for mull over all the latest railway news, including news from the Devon Rail Forum, as well as updated plans to mark Railway 200 in the area.

Photograph: Spring has well and truly arrived at Honiton Station