The Train at Platform 1

The Friends of Honiton Station Newsletter 63 - June 2025

Welcome to the June newsletter. As Summer fast approaches, we are busily putting together plans for the celebration of the 165th birthday of the station in July. Stations and lines across the country continue to mark Railway 200, proving a constant reminder of the need to nurture and develop our railways. Surely the best way to celebrate the railway's past, is to ensure that it has a bright and sustainable future. We will continue to do all we can to support our railway and to campaign for the improvements that will deliver an even better and more reliable service for local passengers.

The South Devon Explorer en route from Birmingham to Plymouth on May 10th, hauled by D105 Western Champion. Photographed at Exminster by Dave Tozer.

Friends Pay Warm Tribute to Station Staff as Part of Railway 200

In all the celebrations of Railway 200, it is important that we acknowledge the vital role of the staff who care for our stations and support passengers who use those stations, in all that the railways have achieved and continue to achieve.

Much was made last year, when the potential closures of ticket offices was under consideration, of the vital contribution of station staff. As the face of the railway, station staff have a massively important role to play, and we were pleased that this was recognised when the last government paused plans to close ticket offices.

We are very lucky at Honiton - and indeed all along the East Devon Line - to have some first class station staff, supported and led by an outstanding Station Manager.

Therefore, the Chairman was delighted to take the opportunity during Railway 200 properly to put on record our thanks to the staff for all that they do. This he did in a letter to the Station Manger, Ben Stephenson, that was shared with Honiton's station staff.

Below is a copy of that letter, sent at the beginning of May.

"First of all, thank you to you and your colleagues for all your efforts to ensure that the necessary works to repair recent damage to the station were completed. We are grateful for the prompt action taken to deal with the graffiti attack on and around the station.

"And we were pleased to see this week a team on site to repair the fence on Platform 2 which had been damaged in a winter storm. The station is already looking so much better as a result.

"For our part, we are continuing to explore ways to develop new projects to enhance the appearance of the station and to celebrate Railway 200. We hope to put forward some ideas for you to consider shortly.

"The Friends of Honiton Station are grateful to you and all your colleagues for everything that you do to make the station such a welcoming and attractive place to be. The work that the Friends do to try and enhance the station would be impossible without the unwavering support and skilful efforts of everyone at SWR.

"In that light, The Friends of Honiton Station would like to put on record our gratitude towards the outstanding station staff at Honiton.

"Their care for the station and for all who pass through it is exemplary and inspirational.

"Whilst the citations on the multiple awards we have been lucky enough to win in recent times often suggest they are entirely due to the efforts of our volunteers, we fully appreciate that none of these projects and improvements would have been possible without the wonderful station staff and all that they do.

"We would like to take this opportunity properly to thank them for all their hard work, and for their enthusiastic support for the station and for The Friends of Honiton Station.

"Surely there is no better way to mark Railway 200 than to ensure that all who work on our railway are properly recognised, appreciated and celebrated."

Look out for news of the various ways in which we will celebrating Railway 200 here in East Devon, as this special year gathers pace. From a steam special (hopefully) in August, to a potential new installation at the station, and from birthday celebrations on July 19th to the postcard project we wrote about last month, there is still much to enjoy in this year devoted to the railway.

Friends Say Thank You to Jenny Brown

This month, we were so sad to receive news from our dear friend and colleague Jenny Brown that she was stepping back from The Friends of Honiton Station with immediate effect.

Jenny was one of the founders of the group, being instrumental both in creating the first set of planters and especially in the vinyl wrap that continues to this day to decorate the shelter, promoting tourism in East Devon.

Since then, Jenny has spearheaded many of our successful projects, including creating the team of adopt-a-potters: local charities who support the station, help keep an eye on one of the planters, and through the artwork on each planter and a plaque nearby, promotes the fine work the charities do in the town.

Speaking after the news broke, the Chairman, Martin Long, said:

"We were very sad to hear that Jenny has decided to step back from her role with The Friends of Honiton Station.

We are extremely grateful for all that she has done for the station, and for the local community.

"From the artwork to the town map, from the mural to the attractive planters, the station has benefited so much from Jenny's work.

"That the station is such a vibrant and welcoming place owes a huge amount to what Jenny has done. We wish her all the best for the future."

Engineering Report for June and July

This month's Engineering Report is that… there is no Engineering Report!

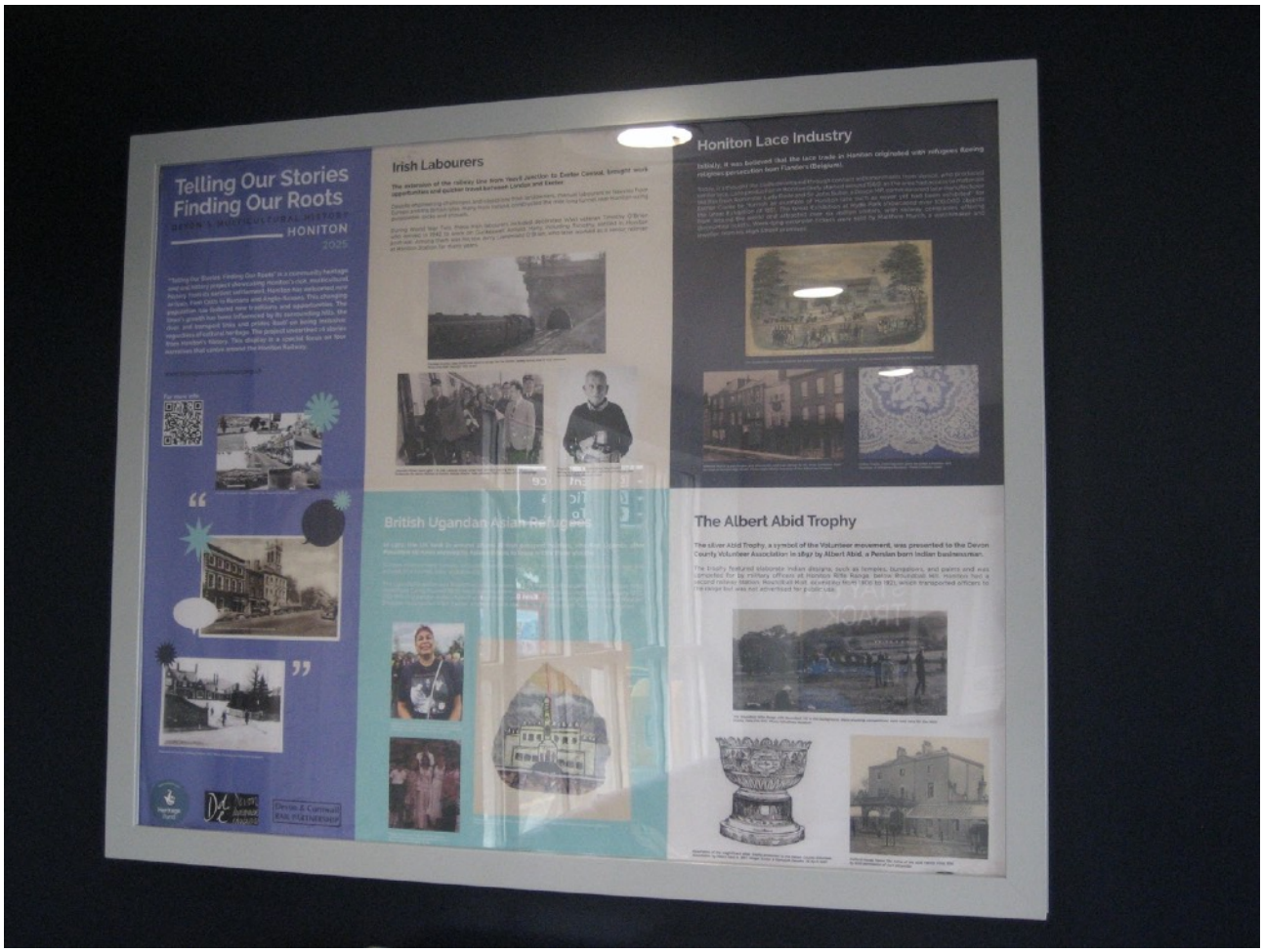
At present, no work is scheduled on the West of England Line between Waterloo and Exeter during June or July.

This is, however, provisional, and we will provide a further update next month if SWR and Network Rail announce any work along the line that is likely to disrupt services.

New Display Installed at Honiton Station

After a short delay, we are pleased to announce that the new railway-themed display has been installed in the waiting room at Honiton Station. It arises from the project Telling Our Stories, Finding Our Roots, which we were involved in last year, which explored the hidden multi-cultural history of the town.

The new display features four of the 17 stories explored in the project, which have a direct connection to the station. The display has been funded by our friends at Devon and Cornwall Rail Partnership. The original project led to a highly-successful exhibition last November and December at the Thelma Hulbert Gallery.



Paws for Thought: SWR Launches New ‘Tickets’ Allowing Assistance Dogs to Reserve Their Own Seat

This month’s good news story features “man’s best friend.” To mark International Guide Dog Day on 30th April, South Western Railway announced the launch of new bespoke cards that allow assistance dogs to ‘reserve’ a seat for themselves and communicate with customers on how not to interact with them.

It comes as sight loss charity Guide Dogs UK issued an important reminder that, while the highly-trained dogs are sweet to look at, they are also working dogs who need to be able to comfortably and confidently look after their owner, and do their job without distraction.

All too often, members of the public will leap to pet a guide dog without thinking twice, but what's meant to be a harmless gesture can in fact be dangerous.

The operator's new Assistance Reservation Cards are double-sided and can be placed on a seat to remind customers that a dog is underneath and therefore to "paws" for thought.

They can be personalised with the assistance dog's name and photo, allowing the dog to communicate three key things:

- I'm a working dog, so please don't stroke me without my owner's permission;
- If I have my harness on, I'm in work mode;
- Please give me some room to help my owner and me.

Pete Bungay, a member of staff at Guide Dogs who has his own assistance dog, Stevie, shared more of his tips for passengers travelling on trains:

- Let them board first - Allow guide dog users extra time and space to board and exit the train safely. Crowding or rushing can be stressful and unsafe for both the person and the dog.

- Keep aisles and doorways clear - Avoid leaving bags and belongings in walkways. Guide dogs need room to navigate safely without obstacles.

- Keep your own pets at a distance - If you are travelling with your own pet, keep them on a lead and away from the guide dog to avoid unwanted interactions.

- Be mindful of noise - Sudden loud noises can be disruptive for guide dogs, so try and maintain a calm and quiet environment around them.

- Don't feed or drop food near the dog - Like any dog, dropped snacks and open food can be a distracting temptation for guide dogs.

- Don't distract the dog - Guide dogs are working. Don't pet, feed, or talk to them without the owner's permission. Even friendly gestures can distract the dogs from their job.

- Speak to the owner, not the dog - Always communicate with the person, not the dog. Give directions to the owner and never give commands or instructions to the dog directly.

- Help with seating if needed - Guide dog users may need a priority seat, so their dog has enough space to lie down safely.

- Respect their space - Give guide dogs and their owners plenty of room. Don't block or crowd their path on trains or in stations.

Pete went on to explain:

"As someone who travels regularly for work and leisure, I can't overstate how much it means when rail staff simply ask if I need any help. Whether booking help through Passenger Assist or travelling on a route familiar to me, I have always found the South Western Railway staff to be amazingly helpful, especially the staff at my local station.

"That small gesture offers huge reassurance and makes a real difference to the confidence of guide dog owners like me."

Michael Adlington, Senior Accessibility and Inclusion Manager at South Western Railway, added:

"We are committed to making our network as accessible as possible for everyone. We understand navigating stations and services can present a unique challenge for people with visual impairments. Guide dogs provide excellent support for those in need, and we want to make sure that with their owners, they can do their job to the greatest extent.

We are happy to pass on Pete Bungay's excellent tips. We know that blind and partially sighted passengers use Honiton Station regularly. And we share SWR's commitment to ensuring that the railway in general, and our station in particular, is as accessible and welcoming to everyone as possible.

What's On: A Summer to Look Forward to

It's that time of year again, when East Devon and the surrounding area bursts into life with an amazing range of events for the whole family to enjoy. Here are just some of the highlights. Many of these events are accessible by public transport.

June 14th and 15th: Lyme Regis Fossil Festival

A free, family-friendly weekend packed with science, discovery and fossil fun. The weekend's schedule includes expert talks, captivating exhibits, guided walks, engaging discussions, hands-on workshops, street performances, and much more.

June 21st and 22nd: Axe Vale Show

This exciting two-day annual rural show promises big entertainment in the main arena and, new for 2025, there will be an emphasis on the younger visitors with a goat petting farm, pony club competitions, free children's games and free entry for children. Plus, there will be craft tents, local produce, trade stalls, and much more.

June 28th: Armed Forces Day, 80th Anniversary Event for VE Day and VJ Day, Honiton High Street

Join the local community for military parades, a military vehicle display, re-enactors, live entertainment, a street party and more.

July 19th: Honiton Market Charter Day

Now firmly established in the Honiton's annual calendar, every year sees the traditional street market and shopkeepers getting involved in the spirit of Charter Day, alongside a variety of entertainments and activities. These take place in the town centre, in Northcote Lane and on Allhallows playing field. Charter Day gives the opportunity for local charities and groups to raise funds and also to showcase all they offer to the community.

July 22nd: Honiton Hot Pennies Ceremony, on Honiton High Street

This local ritual was traditionally part of the opening of Honiton's annual fair. It features the town crier carrying a huge golden glove on the end of a garlanded pole.

Once the crier raises the glove, and the crowd joins in the traditional cries, warm pennies are thrown from the upstairs windows of local hostelries on the High Street for the spectators below to collect.

July 27th: Model Railway Exhibition at Axminster Railway Station

Jointly organised by the Railway Kitchen, Ale Way micropub, and volunteer group For the Love of a Railway, the event will also celebrate the 165th anniversary of the railway's arrival in Axminster.

August 1st to 8th: Sidmouth Folk Festival

Over the course of the week, the festival takes over the streets and venues of Sidmouth, offering an eclectic mix of performances and entertainment, celebrating folk arts and championing traditional music, dance and song.

August 1st to 9th: Lyme Regis Regatta and Carnival Week

A fun-packed week full of events and activities for all the family to enjoy. Highlights include a torchlight procession, a fireworks display, a children's beach treasure hunt, a wacky wheelbarrow race, a dog show, a disco at the Marine Theatre, fishing boat trips, a teddy bears picnic and more.

August 7th: Honiton Show

With its motto 'Where Farming Comes First', Honiton Show is a traditional agricultural show where the best of rural life is held firmly in the spotlight. This popular summer event includes an action-packed main arena, livestock displays, vintage tractors, a dog show and children's entertainment. During the day a free bus service to the show ground operates from Honiton High Street.

August 16th: Honiton Gate to Plate, Honiton High Street

This annual food festival celebrates the region's food and drink, with the emphasis on local suppliers and vendors. Features tastings, demonstrations and workshops. What's not to like!

August 16th: Steam Special at Honiton Railway Station, as part of Railway 200

Re-live the age of steam in this year of celebration for our railways, as the Atlantic Coast Express journeys through East Devon on its way to Exeter.

August 19th to 23rd: Loco Week at Pecorama, Beer

An ultimate railway celebration with guest locomotives, shunting demonstrations, shuttle runs, observation areas, children's activities and modelling fun.

August 22nd and 23rd: Sidmouth Regatta

There will be plenty of action in and on the sea with surf and lifesaving club races, sailing club races and a variety of family-friendly activities and performances. Plus an airshow on the Friday and a fireworks display on the Saturday night.

August 24th and 25th: Honiton Hill Rally at Smeatharpe Airfield

The Honiton Hill Rally offers an amazing showcase of tractors, classic cars, military vehicles and steam engines, plus a host of other attractions, including tractor-pulling, fair rides and large fair organs.

Railway Community Marks VE Day Anniversary and WW2 Southern Railway Staff Casualties

Members of the local community joined together with representatives from railway, heritage and civic organisations on Thursday 8th May for a special 80th anniversary VE Day event at Haslemere Station.

The event, led by Rev. Chris Bessant, rector of Haslemere, and Rev. Chris Henley, railway chaplain, included the unveiling of a new memorial to the 626 Southern Railway victims of World War 2.

The new Haslemere plaque, temporarily mounted on the rear of the signal box, is destined to become the focal point of a memorial garden planned for a wedge of land extending beyond the signal box and behind the cycle store.

Among the guests at the event were representatives from Network Rail, Community Rail Network, the Railway Heritage Trust and Railway 200. South Western Railway was represented by Interim Managing Director, Stuart Meek. Local MP Gregory Stafford was also present

Ken Griffiths, Chair of Haslemere Signal Box Trust, said:

"We felt there was previously not enough done to honour these people. Southern's World War 1 victims – all 585 – are named in a memorial at London Waterloo, but the nearby World War 2 plaque simply refers to the 626 victims.

"We are hoping to identify each of the 626 by name – and perhaps gather details of where and how they died."

Station Groups Encouraged to Remember Workers Affected by Railway Accidents

Community Rail Partnerships and station groups are encouraged to get involved with an innovative project helping communities to connect with their railway history.

The Railway Work, Life and Death Project (RWLD) is a joint initiative between the University of Portsmouth, the National Railway Museum and the Modern Records Centre at the University of Warwick. They also work with other institutions including The National Archives of the UK and the RMT Union.

The initiative aims to make it easier to find out about railway worker accidents in Britain and Ireland from the late 1880s to 1939, providing data about who was involved, what they were doing on the railways, what happened to them and why.

RWLD volunteers are transcribing records and inputting them into the database, which currently contains around 50,000 cases and is freely available from the project website.

The project has even started to expand beyond railway workers, by including people who had a reason to be on or around the railway and will include passengers in the future too.
Some CRPs and station groups are already engaging with RWLD.

Southeast Communities Rail Partnership included a rail worker from the RWLD database, William Betterton, in its Blue Plaques scheme for Railway 200. In March, three people from the database were featured in a community performance at Bitterne Station on the Three Rivers CRP network, and the Westerfield Station Adopters are looking at including the story of porter Harry Davey in the book they're producing about the station.

Posters about former railway staff will be going into stations on the Hills to Harbour CRP route.

Lucy Lomax, Hills to Harbour Project Officer, said:

"It's good to collaborate with community groups and universities where they're working on railway topics – we're looking forward to finding out more about some of the past railway workers in our area and sharing that with the communities they once lived and worked in."

Dr Mike Esbester, senior lecturer in history at the University of Portsmouth, said:

"In the Railway 200 year, there's even more interest than usual in the history of our railway lines and stations. However, what can be missing is the human element.

"These records give us a window into the railway of the past. It's an immensely valuable way for CRPs and station adopters to explore the history of people on their routes or stations. It provides detail on the human stories of our rail network, told sensitively to help expand public appreciation of our railway history."

Let The Shania Train Take the Glastonbury Strain

Sam Ryder will be among a host of star "climate heroes" travelling by train to to perform at the Glastonbury Festival by train this year.

Taking the train is 67% less polluting than driving, and several stars including Sam Ryder, Nova Twins, Self Esteem and Greentea Peng have signed a pledge "I came by train", promoted on social media channels, to encourage everyone going to the festival to be a climate hero too.

As more festival goers prioritise eco-friendly travel, taking the train to the world-famous Glastonbury Festival remains the most sustainable and convenient choice.

The journey is just an hour and 40 minutes from London Paddington to Castle Cary, where a free bus service is available to Worthy Farm, home of Glastonbury.

I Came By Train is a Trainline-led campaign, encouraging music lovers to ditch their car keys and board the train for a stress-free way to get to the Glastonbury Festival in June.

What happens when they join the long queue for the buses from the station to Worthy Farm is possibly quite another matter!

Ashurst Station Adopters Unveil Railway 200 Mural

With our attention focused on creating a new installation at Honiton Station as part of Railway 200, Station adopters at Ashurst in the New Forest recently celebrated Railway 200 by unveiling a 55-foot-long mural featuring the beautiful scenery of the surrounding area.

The local community turned out in force to celebrate at the station and were entertained with music from the Lymington Town Band.

And talking of murals, make sure to take a moment the next time you are passing through Pinhoe Station to enjoy their new nature mural on the Exeter-bound platform.

Network Rail Paints a Rather Different Scene

Meanwhile, as the UK enjoyed some much-needed warm weather over the last few weeks, Network Rail Wessex engineers have also been busy with their paint-brushes preparing the railway for a potentially hot summer.

Hundreds of Network Rail workers armed with brushes, rollers and approximately 1,500 litres of white paint took to the tracks.

Extreme hot weather is a serious challenge for the railway. Britain's network has thousands of miles of track and in a summer heatwave, rails in direct sunshine can be as much as 20°C hotter than air temperature.

As rails are made from steel, they expand as they get warmer, and can start to curve - otherwise known as 'buckling' - which can lead to disruption for passengers. Typically, a rail painted white is 5°C to 10°C cooler than one left unpainted.

Alongside painting sections of rail white, Network Rail works closely with specialist weather forecasters and local weather stations to make necessary plans and take action so rails are less likely to buckle, this includes checking track stability each winter.

Meanwhile, probes have been installed on certain parts of the network to alert when track temperatures rise. When very hot weather is forecast, train speed restrictions are introduced resulting in less force on the rail.

Watch Your Step: As Waterloo Escalators Are Replaced

If you have travelled to Waterloo recently, you will have noticed that Network Rail is currently finalising a programme of work which will see all four escalators in London Waterloo station replaced in 2025. The escalators for Exit 2 are ageing, meaning parts are more difficult to repair or procure so we've been working on replacing them with modern, more reliable models.

The work will take several months to complete and is due to start on the first pair of escalators this summer. A communications campaign in the station is underway to let passengers know of any disruption to their journey.

May Timetable Changes Come into Effect

The SWR Summer2025 timetables began on Sunday 18th May. There are no significant changes to train times, with only minor changes to some services between Brockenhurst and Lymington Pier.

Timetables are available to download from our website, and from the SWR website.

Details of the service between Exeter and Waterloo can also be found on the timetable posters at local stations. We are grateful to SWR for continuing to make these posters available at stations. We have long argued that these posters provide an essential service to customers.

Turning to Great Western Railway, their summer timetable began on the same date. Seasonal changes reflect the increase in leisure journeys over summer, and includes increasing services for connections to Gatwick to support international travel to and from the UK.

Here in the South West, the scenic Looe Valley is also set to benefit from a major timetable overhaul to improve connectivity for locals and visitors alike. Developed together with the Devon and Cornwall Rail Partnership, the changes aim to improve the travel experience by improving connection times at Liskeard to and from Plymouth and Cornwall.

Currently connections for Looe services to key trains at Liskeard quite often have more than 20 minutes in both directions. This will come down by more than half on several services making it easier for both local leisure journeys and for business travel to London. The last weekday train will also leave Looe at 2155, 18 minutes later than previously.

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

"Many thanks to GWR for making these changes to the Looe Valley Line timetable from May. We firmly believe the new service will encourage more people to take the train to and from Looe, something that will benefit the town, area and local businesses."

Looking further ahead, GWR have also added some additional calls at Saltash to help with customers switching to rail from road during work on the Saltash road tunnels which is planned for later this year.

With a significant remodelling of CrossCountry train's timetable, there will also be some changes to GWR's service between Cardiff and Penzance. GWR will operate Penzance to Exeter direct and Exeter to Cardiff (Taunton to Cardiff on Sundays). CrossCountry maintains its direct services to Taunton, Bristol and beyond.

One of the more unusual features of the recent Working Timetable is an empty GWR train, due to travel from Bristol Temple Meads to Exeter Central and back - the long-way round - as required on weekdays. On days when it is operating, it will leave Bristol at 8 a.m. and travel via Bath and Westbury to Yeovil Pen Mill and then to Yeovil Junction. From there it will head for Honiton – where it will wait from 11.30 until 11.55, before the last leg of the journey to the bay platform (now re-open for business) at Exeter Central.

The train does the reverse journey, leaving Exeter at 13.45, with a short wait at Honiton to pass the 14.15 Waterloo to Exeter service, before continuing on its way.

At this stage, it remains unclear how often this empty train will operate; it did not run at all during the first two weeks of the new timetable. It appears to be for driver route leaning purposes, and it is likely to be operated where possible by a GWR five-carriage IET.

It will be interesting to see just how regular a sight this empty train is during the early summer – especially as its cousin, the 18.18 GWR arrival at Honiton from Exeter, en route to Axminster, has all too often become something of a rare sighting this year so far…

South Western Railway Recovers Taxpayer Money from Fare Dodgers

Local passengers may have seen South Western Railway's Revenue Protection Team out and about on several occasions recently. Now they have been front and centre in a new season of the Channel 5 series, 'Fare Dodgers: At War with the Law' which began in May.

Matthew Evans, Senior Stakeholder and Public Affairs Manager at South Western Railway, said:

"This documentary follows the commitment and hard work of our revenue protection teams and lifts the lid on their efforts to reduce fare evasion, making train travel fair for fare paying customers."

New research by SWR that shows over three-quarters of those questioned say that those who deliberately avoid paying the correct fare are exploiting the system and it is not fair to paying customers. The poll of 2,000 UK adults conducted by YouGov revealed that 68% disapprove of deliberate fare evasion, and say that fare dodging is a serious problem that should be penalised. This was supported by 67% who believe railway companies should do more to catch those who intentionally avoid paying the correct fare.

SWR announced that they were able to recover £3.4 million of taxpayer money from fare-lodgers in the last financial year. The operator was able to identify a number of persistent evaders and over the last year, recovered over £1 million from such fraud cases.

This included an individual who owed over £49,000 for five years of dodging fares, and another customer, shown in the documentary, who owed more than £19,000.

Of the 153.2 million journeys that take place on South Western Railway's network annually, around seven million are believed to have been made without a valid ticket. This issue is of particular interest and concern for us here in East Devon, where there are no stations with gate-line barriers between Exeter Central and Salisbury.

Too often, it is far too easy for fare-dodgers to make journeys between local stations without paying – especially as guards who check tickets between Honiton and Exeter often seem to be the exception rather than the rule.

It is estimated that unpaid fares cost South Western Railway close to £40 million a year, money, they say, that could have been reinvested to deliver the best possible service and provide better value for money. According to the Rail Delivery Group, this figure rises to over £240 million a year for the whole of the rail industry.

Peter Williams, Customer and Commercial Director at South Western Railway, said:

"Most customers on our network pay the correct fare and we understand genuine mistakes happen. But there's growing evidence of some systematically abusing the system -a criminal offence that deprives the railway of hundreds of millions of pounds each year. We have a responsibility to protect revenue from tickets so that money can be reinvested into delivering the best possible service.

"We're proud of the work our revenue protection team does and the role they play in reducing fare dodging. By opening up our operations, we're showing how effective our data-led approach and hard-working team are at identifying and deterring fare evaders, keeping travel fair for fare paying customers.

"Our specially trained teams work around the clock to check tickets on stations and trains. They face many challenges, but their efforts have helped cut ticketless travel by more than 40% since 2017 and recover millions of pounds of taxpayer money."

Episodes of the documentary series 'Fare Dodgers: At War with the Law' will be available to watch on the Channel 5 app, as well as on Monday nights at 9 p.m.

Friends Of Barnstaple Railway Station Get Cash Boost from GWR

A project to enhance Barnstaple railway station with new planters, a signal box style bug house and history boards recently received a £2,500 grant from Great Western Railway.

Friends Of Barnstaple Railway Station successfully applied for a grant from the train operator's Customer and Community Improvement Fund, which was launched in January to support local communities and address areas of social need.

As part of GWR's National Rail Contract with the Department for Transport, the train operator is committed to supporting schools, colleges, councils, community and other not-for-profit organisations by aiding several initiatives.

Two teams are now working on this project. A local men's shed is constructing new railway wagon planters and will create a bespoke signal box style bug house while they will also repair the existing planters. Men's Sheds are community spaces for men to connect, converse and create.

A heritage team also will help design the history boards that will celebrate the station's 170 years of history. The environment enhancement project will look to be completed by the end of August.

Friends Of Barnstaple Railway Station Chair Tim Steer said:

"We're extremely grateful for this funding from Great Western Railway, which will help to enhance the station's environment for all rail users as well as create history boards to tell community groups about the station's history.

"Barnstaple station is the terminus for GWR customers who join the North Devon line, and it continues to steadily grow in usage. Enhancing the station will attract new customers to the rail network as well as help keep up the Friends Of Barnstaple Railway Station's award-winning work. The island platform is going to be a focal point for many photos, what an incredible first and last impression it will create."

The project will have an incremental approach to the enhancements. As each new planter is constructed and brought to the station, new seasonal and perennials will be added by the station volunteers.

The signal box style bug house will be constructed to add biodiversity and finally the interpretation boards will be constructed by the heritage team and installed by GWR.

GWR Senior Community Impact Manager Emma Morris said:

"The Customer and Community Improvement Fund is a fantastic opportunity for us to invest in our communities in projects that really make a difference at a local level. We're delighted to support this particular initiative, which will help enhance the station environment as we come into the summer."

Are You Sitting Comfortably?

One positive feature of the new SWR timetable is that there has been a change in the planned arrangements for re-fuelling a unit at Exeter St David's during the day.

In the old timetable, this meant that the 10.18 departure from Honiton would travel into Exeter as 6 carriages, before 3 of these carriages were detached. The 11.25 train from Exeter then became one of the most crowded journeys of the day, running with only 3 carriages.

Similarly, the 14.16 departure from Honiton would travel into Exeter with only 3 carriages (leading to over-crowding on days such as the start or end of holiday weekends), before being attached to the now re-fuelled unit, to run the 15.25 departure from Exeter as 6 carriages.

When a full complement of carriages is available - and as already noted there is a sequence of periodic maintenance and refurbishment of these units due over the next 18 months - the new plan is that these departures will all run with 6 carriages. This will solve the over-crowding problem of the 11.25 service in particular.

There will still be a unit refuelled at Exeter, however. It would appear to be three carriages from the 15.20 from Waterloo, the 17.16 from Honiton. The 19.25 from Exeter will now, therefore be formed of 3 carriages.

And Finally… SWR is "Nationalised"

With little fanfare – indeed part of the first service was operated by a Rail Replacement Bus - South Western Railway's services transferred into public ownership on May 25th. Operations are now being run by a new public sector operator: South Western Railway Limited. For now, this will be a subsidiary of the public corporation, DfT Operator Limited (DfTO), which will eventually transfer into Great British Railways (GBR), once established.

Under the government's plan to unify track and train under one organisation, GBR will be the single 'directing mind' for the railway, *"putting passengers and customers first, rebuilding trust in the railway and simplifying the industry."*

In February, the government's consultation on the Railways Bill outlined plans to establish GBR, which will consolidate the 14 different train operating companies, Network Rail and DfTO into a single organisation.

In her statement confirming SWR's transfer, the Secretary of State for Transport said that The Railways Bill will be laid before Parliament in this session and she expects GBR to be operational around 12 months after the Bill receives Royal Assent.

Back to the Future? Anyone recognise the arrow logo!

Stop Press: August Steam Special

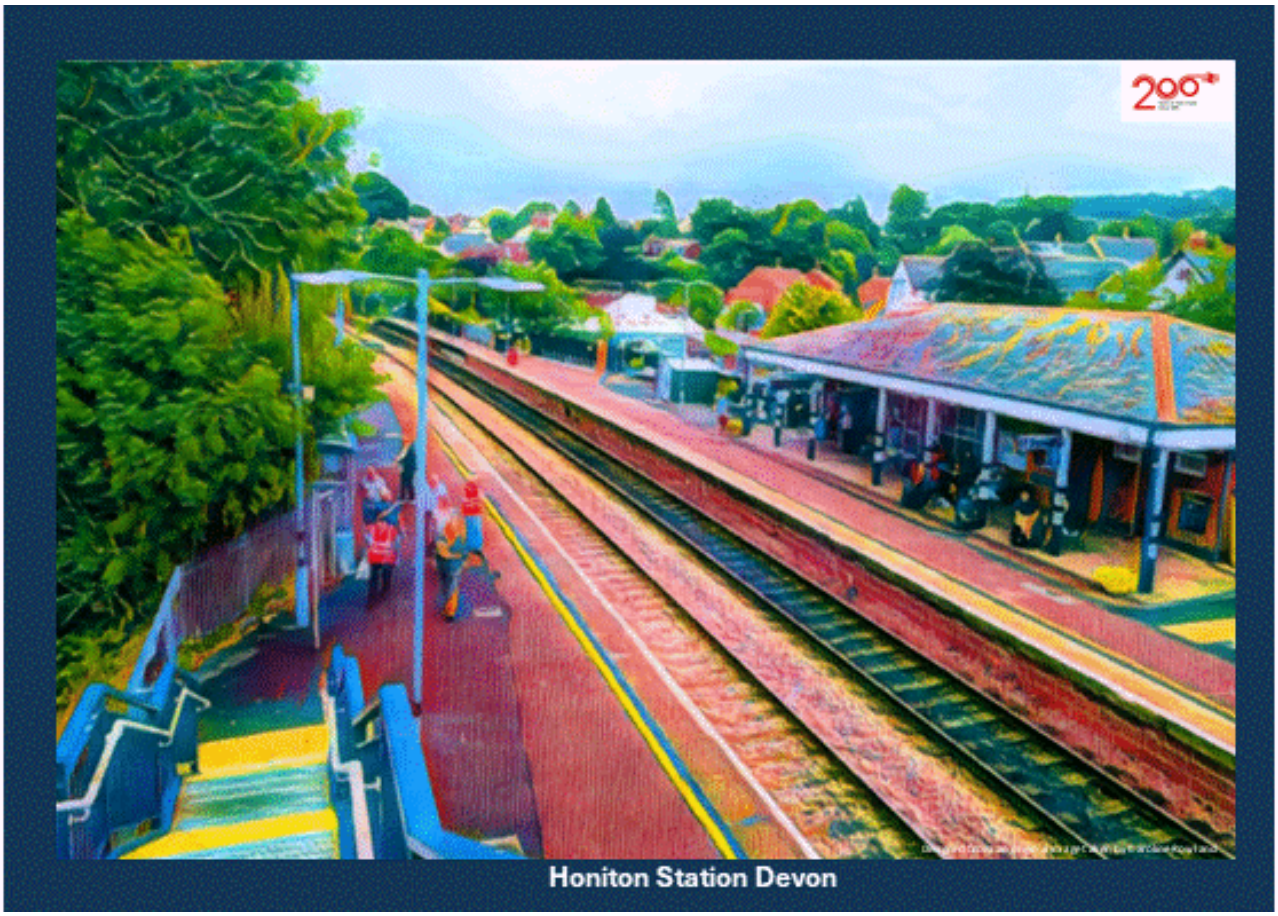
We now have some more details of the planned running of the Atlantic Coast Express (ACE) steam special on Saturday August 16th.

We hope to welcome No. 60163 Tornado which, as enthusiasts will know, is a Class A1 locomotive completed in 2008 to an original design by Arthur Peppercorn. It was the first new build British mainline steam locomotive since 1960, and is the only Peppercorn Class A1 still in existence.

The locomotive worked on heritage and mainline trains across Britain between 2008 and 2022, when it was withdrawn for a major overhaul. It only returned to operations in August 2024 following a series of setbacks.

At present, we expect the train to operate to its usual schedule when the ACE is running. This will mean that the train is expected to reach Honiton at around 12.25, waiting in the station until approximately 12.55, giving everyone plenty of opportunities to take photographs, on what should be a good occasion to mark Railway 200 in the town.

Visitors can also make a day of it, by visiting the Gate to Plate food festival which is taking place all day on the High Street.



One of the celebratory postcards produced by Blackmore Vale Community Rail Partnership to mark Railway 200. They are available from the station ticket office, as well as from Allhallows Museum, the Thelma Hulbert Gallery and Honiton Library. The project is also supported by the Devon and Cornwall Rail Partnership. For full details of the project, see last month's newsletter.