The Train at Platform 1

The Friends of Honiton Station Newsletter 67 - October 2025

Welcome to the October newsletter. This month we continue to watch the skies, as we all monitor the rainfall across our region, which will hopefully eventually lead to an end to the emergency timetable in operation since August 11th. It is a sobering thought that the reality of climate change is that this pattern of clay banks drying out during a summer drought, followed by the onset of wetter autumns and winters, may be the sign of things of come. The railway is going to have to find ways to adapt to this new normal, as are all of us, unless some hard choices are made.

Continuing our recent theme of nostalgic days at Honiton, another photo from Dave Withey.

College Students Go “On The Buses”

The biggest test of the temporary reduced timetable was always going to be the return of Exeter College students in September.

Unfortunately, it also coincided with a major track circuit fault between Pinhoe and Cranniford Crossing near Cranbrook. This led to trains being seriously delayed, running at reduced speed, and on one day even being operated under caution through red signals by having an escort in the cab to act as a human Token, to allow the train to pass through the affected section.

Once things began to settle down again (although speed restrictions on the section remained for several days), SWR were able to put their plan into operation to support College students with their daily commute.

Managers, including Andrew Ardley, worked closely with officials from Exeter College in planning and then tweaking, the planned provision to make best use of resources and to get students to their destination as smoothly as possible in the circumstances. Andrew, the Regional Development Manager, commented at the end of the first week of the operation:

"We have reviewed the provision of services to / from Exeter under the current Soil Moisture Deficit (SMD) timetable after the first few days of operation in the new college and school term, including supporting buses, in conjunction with Exeter College, our bus supplier FTS and GWR.

"The general feedback is that the service has been operating well, albeit with some busy trains. Having reviewed data on usage we are now able to redeploy some resources to spread demand, and give greater choice, whilst maintaining standby capability for the reduced service in the event there is disruption on the Waterloo route."

A large capacity double deck bus (seating 100 students) is providing a scheduled 08.36 service from Axminster, calling at Honiton only (08.56) before Exeter Central (09.40) and Exeter St David's (09.45). This service is aimed at students who have lectures starting at 10.00 and is intended take pressure off the 07.34 and 09.49 trains from Axminster. There will no longer be a bus operating from Axminster and Honiton in parallel with the early train.

We had been seeking from the beginning a service for these students that replicated the 09.16 train that normally operates, and which is popular with students with a 10.00 start. This use of the bus was a welcome alternative, provided that there is no excessive overcrowding on the 07.53 train from Honiton, which is apparently still extremely busy.

A single deck bus will continue to run from Feniton at 07.42 calling at Whimple and Pinhoe (the latter for set down only) before Exeter Central (08.34) and Exeter St David's (08.39).

The afternoon additional buses were altered to strike the right balance between the Exeter College finish time and providing relief to the 17.25 train from St David's. Students and others had commented that the 15.58 and 16.00 departure times were too early for many students, whose lectures did not finish until 16.00.

It was a surprise that the College authorities did not seem to raise this as a concern when the original timetable was proposed. It is worth recording that SWR moved to run these buses at a later time within a very few days of the problem first surfacing.

The ongoing timetable for these buses is as follows

Exeter St Davids	16:27	16:27
Exeter Central	16:40	16:40
Pinhoe	17:00	
Cranbrook	17:10	
Whimple	17:20	
Feniton	17:35	
Honiton		17:30
Axminster		17:50

All these bus services are shown as scheduled timings on rail online journey planners.

SWR reminded students that the current ticket acceptance arrangement with Stagecoach for the service 4 between Exeter St David's and Pinhoe (and vice versa) will continue to operate between 08.00 and 09.00 and 16.30 and 17.30 to provide access to and from the college's Pinhoe Cumberland Way campus as an alternative to the trains.

In addition to the scheduled buses, SWR have promised that, at least in the short term, there will be standby vehicles at Exeter St David's and Axminster at various times in the day when they are not being used for the above services.

These have already proved very useful, for instance when trains were at a standstill due to the track circuit failure, to provide a basic service from Exeter to Honiton and Axminster.

In his message to stakeholders about the provision of buses for college students, Andrew Ardley took the opportunity to give an update on the issue referred to in the latest poster in the station waiting room, of diesel units being out of service, leading to short-formed trains. He said:

"We have been working closely with our engine supplier to reduce the number of diesel trains that have been out of service in recent weeks awaiting replacements for engines that have failed prematurely.

"I am pleased to advise that train availability has been much improved over the last few weeks with most days being run with the full formations although the situation is not fully resolved yet.

"We are in addition just starting a refurbishment and upgrade programme of this ageing fleet and at least one unit will be out of commission at any one time for the next few years. We do not expect this to affect train formations if there are no other availability issues."

Sadly, September did not immediately prove a success when it came to train availability. For instance, on September 16th, passengers travelling from Honiton into Exeter faced two successive short-formed trains, with the 12.11 formed of three carriages and, incredibly, the 10.12 with only two. As you can imagine, this service was not just full, or even full and standing, but full, standing and uncomfortable for much of its journey west of Honiton (I know. I was on board!)

GWR and Network Rail Support Green Initiatives

It is always good to report on initiatives by our railway companies to support people's attempts to live more sustainably.

Passengers at Bristol Temple Meads can now use dedicated bins for food waste, separating it from general rubbish and recyclable items like plastic bottles and cardboard, which will boost recycling rates and cut down on the amount of waste going to landfill sites.

Segregating food waste means that items placed in the recycling bin will remain clean and free of contamination, which can sometimes result in batches of dry recyclables being rejected. Dedicated food waste collection also means that fewer items will end up in landfill sites, helping to reduce greenhouse gases and enabling more sustainable methods of processing waste.

The new bins can be found in the station's subway, framed by a colourful wall design highlighting the station's Zero to Landfill initiative. It is hoped that the prominent location of the new bins will encourage passengers to use the new facilities and increase awareness of more sustainable habits, while helping to keep the station clean and welcoming.

Using the bins inside the station can also help passengers to avoid receiving a fixed penalty notice from the Council, which can fine people who drop litter outside the station.

Gabriella Colwell, Network Rail's Station Delivery Manager at Bristol Temple Meads, said:

"We have installed a recycling station at Bristol Temple Meads in the passenger subway which has three designated bins to separate food waste, dry mixed recycling, and general waste.

"We want to encourage passengers to keep the station clean and tidy but also provide them with the facility of segregating their waste much like they would do at home.

"This initiative helps Network Rail implement best practice when it comes to sustainability, supports the station achieving a goal of removing zero waste to landfill, and complies with the Government's simpler recycling legislation."

In another sustainability boost at the station, Network Rail has teamed up with environmental charity City to Sea to provide free water refills in the subway, encouraging passengers to ditch single-use plastic and refill their bottles on the go.

The first-of-its-kind collaboration has seen the installation of prominent refill stations, station-wide signage, digital screens, and in-app integration through City to Sea's Refill app. Together, the two water refill points have saved over 200,000 plastic bottles from ending up as waste.

A spokesperson for Network Rail said:

"Rail is already one of the greenest forms of transport and small changes like segregating food waste and providing free water refills can have a big impact as Network Rail seeks to run a net-zero carbon emissions railway by 2050."

SWR Recognises England's Greatest Monarch (Possibly)

For those who have commented in the past that SWR seems to have abandoned the idea of naming trains, South Western Railway recently bucked the trend with an eye-catching event at Kingston upon Thames.

SWR joined forces with The Rest is History's Tom Holland to name a train after Athelstan, the first King of England on the 1,100-year anniversary of his coronation of King Athelstan 4th September 925 in Kingston upon Thames (where else!).

In a ceremony at the station, the globally acclaimed podcaster and historian unveiled the new King Athelstan name on one SWR's Class 450 trains, flanked by Saxon warriors.

While less widely known than successors such as William the Conqueror, Henry VIII and Elizabeth I, in 2021 The Rest is History declared him England's greatest monarch following a public poll.

SWR is the only train operator to serve Kingston upon Thames, where Athelstan and six other Saxon kings were crowned.

The event on Platform 1 saw local children from the King Athelstan Primary School donning crowns as well as a choral performance by the Tiffin School.
Sir Ed Davey, the MP for Kingston and Surbiton, and Cllr Noel Hadjimichael, the Mayor of Kingston, joined Tom Holland with tributes on behalf of the town and borough. The Bishop of Kingston, Martin Gainsborough, blessed the train to conclude the ceremony.

Tom Holland, historian and podcaster, commented:

"Who better to have a train named after him than Athelstan, the great Anglo-Saxon king who first set England on track to becoming a united kingdom?"

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

"It's a privilege to have Tom Holland unveil the newly named King Athelstan train. Few people have done more to bring the story of England's first king to new audiences. As it travels around the network, we hope our train will inspire customers to discover more about Athelstan's reign, and his coronation in Kingston 1,100 years ago. As the only operator serving Kingston, we wanted be part of marking this special anniversary — commemorating the town's remarkable history, as well as celebrating its present and future."

Sir Ed Davey, MP for Kingston and Surbiton and Leader of the Liberal Democrats, commented:

"When we were planning on the sorts of things we might do to celebrate Kingston 2025, I don't think any of us envisaged the dedication of a train. It's a little unusual but absolutely in the spirit of the occasion and I've been delighted to be a part of today."

King Athelstan was the grandson of Alfred the Great, whose coronation at Kingston preceded his unification of England as Rex Anglorum, King of the English.

Honiton MP Calls for Local Railway Line Improvement

Our local MP took the opportunity of a debate on transport inequality across the regions on September 11th to call for urgent upgrades to improve commuter rail services across our part of East Devon. Richard re-iterated the need for the dualling of a section of track on the Exeter to London Waterloo line at Whimple. He said:

"If the track were dualled for just a three-mile section at Whimple, South Western Railways could run an additional hourly shuttle service between Axminster and Exeter. That would give Honiton and Axminster two trains every hour to Exeter."

Mr Foord commented on the reduced timetable on South Western Railway services, which he said has caused significant disruption for commuters in East Devon. He said: *"The infrequent service has meant either a lot of hanging around on platforms for commuters; more cars travelling into Exeter; or a very long bus journey."*

He urged the Rail Minister to invest in the line, reminding him that it is one of only two rail routes into the South West. Here is the text of what Richard had to say:

In Devon, the struggle with our rail infrastructure is not just an occasional disruption; it is an everyday reality. Every year, there are around 50 million rail journeys to, from or within the south-west of England, yet according to the Office of Rail and Road, between January and March this year, only 67% of South Western Railway services ran on time, meaning that one in three trains arrived late.

Those figures were collected even before the disruption on South Western Railway over the summer, when speeds were reduced because of the hot, dry weather caused by the "soil moisture deficit". A journey from Honiton to London, which should take a little over three hours, was dragged out to nearly four. Services from Axminster, Whimple and Feniton to Exeter were reduced to just one every two hours.

That is not a service that people can rely on for work, for getting to college or for family life, and with hotter summers set to become more frequent, we need a lasting solution.

Even in normal times, the line is fragile. It depends on a long single-track section, which means that if one train is late, other trains are delayed, too. Trains back up at passing points, delays ripple down the line, and at busy times South Western Railway has to cut—or it has been cutting, at least—carriage numbers in half, leaving people crammed in.

One solution would involve increasing rail capacity along the line between Axminster and Exeter. At its heart, there would be a new 3-mile section of dual track near Whimple and Cranbrook. That single improvement would make a huge difference.

With the double track in place, South Western Railway could run an additional hourly shuttle service between Axminster and Exeter, which would give Honiton and Axminster two trains every hour to Exeter and would mean that Whimple and Feniton would get a reliable hourly service. People would have better onward connections from Exeter St Davids to Plymouth, Barnstaple, Bristol, Birmingham and beyond.

For students studying at Exeter college, for workers heading into Exeter and for businesses trading across the south-west, such a solution would be transformative.

It would make the railway more resilient. When there are delays, whether they are because of flooding, autumn leaves or dry clay embankments, trains could pass more easily. With the Government planning around 20,000 new homes along the line between Axminster and Exeter, demand on this stretch of railway will only increase.

Finally, we cannot ignore the rolling stock—the trains themselves. The diesel fleet is nearly 40 years old. Reliability is failing and spare parts are running out. We need Government decisions on new trains—battery, electric or hybrid—so that by the early 2030s we might have a modern, clean, reliable fleet. Rural and coastal communities such as Honiton and Sidmouth must not be left behind. South Western Railway is doing what it can.

Since I asked the Rail Minister a question this morning at Transport questions, South Western Railway has announced replacement buses from Axminster to Exeter, and between Feniton, Whimple and Exeter. But that is a sticking plaster. What we really need is investment that would allow it to run reliable trains, not just replacement bus services.

People in the south-west pay many of the same taxes as those in London, but face long delays, overcrowding and fewer trains. It is time for the Government to demonstrate that attention to transport in the south-west is just as necessary as that in London.

The question referred to above was a put down for Oral Answer, but as it was Question 17 did not get asked in the Chamber. Unless the Minister answered his question in connection with another which was called by the Speaker, Richard will receive a Written Answer. His question was: "What recent assessment has she made of the adequacy of passenger rail infrastructure."

October and November Engineering Report

Here is the latest update on planned engineering work. Work may still be affected by issues related to the temporary reduced timetable. And additional work will need to be scheduled at some point to prepare the affected track for the removal of speed restrictions and the resumption of normal services, when Network Rail decide it is appropriate to do so.

Wednesday 15th and Thursday 16th October

On these days, the New Street bridge will be closed to vehicles. Diversions will be in place. This road closure is to allow an inspection of the bridge to take place.

At this stage, no plans have been announced to close the railway line above this bridge during the day while these works are taking place. It is likely, however, that the line may be “closed” for short periods during the time when trains are not expected, in order to facilitate any access from below that workers need to have. This is actually easier to achieve during the time of reduced timetables, as there is effectively an almost two hour gap when the line is quiet.

It is also possible that the line will be closed overnight between Wednesday and Thursday while this work takes place. If so, neighbours can expect to receive letters from Network Rail warning them of the work.

Saturday 1st and Sunday 2nd November

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

Great Western Railway services will also be affected by this work. Please see their publicity for more details.

London Waterloo to Exeter services will start from Salisbury.

London Waterloo to Salisbury stopping services will not run.

Additional services will run between London Waterloo and Basingstoke.

Buses will run between Basingstoke and Salisbury.

Tuesday 4th to Thursday 6th November

SWR services were expected to be disrupted, due to engineering work between Taunton and Exeter St David’s which would have required some GWR services between London Paddington and the South West to be diverted between Yeovil Junction and Honiton.

However, this rail improvement work has since been postponed by Network Rail until 2026 and a normal train service will operate on GWR instead.

Services through Honiton may still be operating to the reduced timetable at this time.

Sunday 9th November and Sunday 16th November

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

Great Western Railway services will be affected by this work. Please see their publicity for more details.

London Waterloo to Exeter services will start from Gillingham.

A revised service will run between London Waterloo and Andover.

Buses will run between Andover and Gillingham (non-stop).

Buses will run between Andover and Gillingham via Salisbury.

Saturday 22nd and Sunday 23rd November

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

London Waterloo to Exeter St David's services will start from Basingstoke.

London Waterloo to Salisbury stopping services will start from Reading on Saturday.

Sunday 30th November

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

London Waterloo to Exeter St Davids services will be revised with some services starting from Basingstoke.

Looking further ahead…

As well as work to restore normal services, look out in our next newsletter for news of the Christmas and New Year period, when a number of engineering work projects are undertaken across the rail network.

Railway 200 Poem and TV Documentaries Mark Anniversary

The 200th anniversary of the modern railway has now been celebrated with a commemorative poem from Poet Laureate Simon Armitage.

Titled 'The Longest Train In The World', the poem was published at the end of August, as the year-long celebration of the past, present and future of the railway stepped up a gear. The bicentenary celebration is inspired by the opening of the Stockton and Darlington Railway on 27th September 1825, a journey that changed the world forever.

The anniversary was marked on TV by a number of special programmes, including two-part documentaries on Channel 4 and the BBC, and a four-week retrospective season of classic documentaries shown on BBC4.

The programmes from Channel 4 included a range of colorised film and photographs, showing the railway both in the UK and abroad, including the building of the railways in India. The second programme included discussion of the role of the railways in two World Wars.

The BBC's documentaries, inevitably, were led by Michael Portillo, who over the years has become the face of railway travelogues, with multiple UK-based series of Great British Railway Journeys and Coastal Railway Journeys, as well as overseas visits ranging from much of Europe, the USA and Canada, as well as Australia and parts of Asia, including Vietnam and Thailand.

The first part of Michael Portillo's 200 Years of the Railways focused heavily in the Stockton and Darlington Railway, although he also explored Hitachi's work on battery-powered trains, new trains being introduced on the Tyne and Wear Metro and the use of simulators in driver training. The second episode featured the Liverpool to Manchester Railway, and its impact.

The retrospective season included classics such as the time-lapse film of the journey from London to Brighton in five minutes, personal reflections on the railway by Victoria Wood, Miles Kington and Michael Palin and a documentary from 2008 on The Last Days of Steam. From even longer ago, the BBC brought out a feature from 1988 on the Settle to Carlisle line, at a time when it was in danger of being closed or sold off. The line was finally saved after a long and passionate campaign.

The Longest Train In The World

We stood in a northern field and witnessed it
rocketing past, barrelled and chimneyed,
towing an open-top truck, kicking up dust
and chucking out sparks as it cantered
the metal road. We gasped and it gasped back.
It kept coming: we sat with our legs dangling
over a stone bridge as it steamed along,
cheeks and chest puffed out, lungs heaving,
hauling the golden age and ragging a blue sky
with silver clouds. We saluted – it hooted back.
It kept on coming: from steep embankments
and country platforms we whistled and flagged,
tried to peek inside the upholstered Pullmans
and catch the eye of important someones
riding on plush cushions; we waved,
hoping a gloved hand might wave back.
It kept on coming: we clapped like mad
when its diesel engines went like the clappers,

gawped from city streets and apartments,
smiled at hundreds of faces, as if the carriages
whooshed entire towns of passengers station
to station. It kept on coming, tunnelling
under mountain ranges then vaulting ravines
and canyons. When sleepwalking coaches
shushed through curtained suburbs at night
we wished them sweet dreams; when freight containers
trundled and rumbled down branching branch lines
we nodded a knowing wink to the rolling stock
and it winked back. It just kept on coming:
we fist-bumped and high-fived the sleek machines
of the future, some bulleting here to there,
some gliding on air. And we waited to clock
the last guard's van swinging its red lantern,
but that didn't happen: rounding the globe
coupled nose to tail to nose to tail that train
was two centuries long and still counting.

Copyright 2025: Simon Armitage

SWR Marks Anniversary of Vital Suicide Prevention Partnership

We have reported regularly on efforts by the rail industry to support the vital work of Samaritans as they try to carry out their vital work.

Network Rail and Samaritans' partnership marks its 15th anniversary this year, as figures show one in 10 life-saving interventions under its joint initiative take place on the South Western Railway network.

Network Rail and South Western Railway took the opportunity of World Suicide Prevention Day on 10th September to remind the public to recognise the vital role they can play in saving lives by learning how to spot when someone may be in emotional distress near the railway and how to safely take action.

The call comes as Network Rail marks the 15th anniversary of its partnership with Samaritans, which has transformed how the rail industry deals with vulnerable people across the rail network.

Between April 2024 and March 2025, one in 10 life-saving interventions took place across the Wessex route, which connects London with Surrey, Hampshire, Dorset, Somerset and Devon as well as the Island Line on the Isle of Wight. Across the route, this represents an increase of approximately 9% on the previous year. Nationally, the number of life-saving interventions on Britain's rail network rose by 18% highlighting the continued impact of this collaboration.

The partnership provides specialist training for rail staff and works to raise public awareness about suicide prevention through national campaigns, research and guidelines that promote responsible reporting of suicide in the media.

It also teaches people to recognise the signs that someone may need help and equips them with safe ways to intervene – ranging from simply talking to the person to contacting professional support services.

Louise McNally, Network Rail's suicide prevention lead, said:

"The number of life-saving interventions on the railway has doubled since the partnership first began in 2010, a powerful demonstration of the impact of our partnership with Samaritans across the rail network.

"Our Rail Suicide Prevention Programme helps the entire industry to respond effectively to people in distress, while also providing invaluable support to staff involved in these difficult incidents."

Dave Brown, Head of rail programme at Samaritans, commented:

"Since 2010, Network Rail and Samaritans have been working together to ensure that fewer people die by suicide on the rail. As demonstrated in Don's story, we know that 67% of people in the UK would appreciate someone checking on them, offering words of support, if they were struggling to cope. As part of our partnership we equip both rail staff and the public with the confidence to approach someone they may think is in distress. By doing this, they could save a life."

To date, more than 31,000 rail employees and British Transport Police officers have been trained in suicide prevention techniques through the Samaritans' 'Managing Suicidal Contacts' course. This training has enabled staff to recognise the signs of someone in distress and to offer assistance in critical moments.

Between 2024 and 2025 2,284 interventions were recorded by British Transport Police as being carried carried out across the national rail network by railway staff, BTP, local police and members of the public.

SWR Launches Hard-hitting Campaign On Violence Against Staff

South Western Railway launched a wide-ranging publicity campaign last month, to focus people's attention on the totally unacceptable rise in assaults and abuse against its colleagues.

We are happy to amplify this message: harassment and threats of violence against staff are completely unacceptable. The public has come out strongly and repeatedly against attacks on emergency workers and shop staff. It should be the same for transport workers, who do so much to support the travelling public, and who have the right to work without the threat of assault.

So far this year, SWR has recorded more than two assaults every day against colleagues across its network. These include violent attacks and verbal threats. Indeed, the number of reported incidents of violent and public order offences have doubled between 2020-21 and 2024-25, according to British Transport Police (BTP).

While improved reporting might explain some of the rise, this upward trend is in line with similar increases seen in other public services and industries, such as in the NHS and the retail sector.

These incidents can have a significant impact on colleagues' physical and mental wellbeing, even affecting railway operations as colleagues take time off to recover. They can also result in serious consequences for the perpetrator, as SWR supports the British Transport Police in launching investigations and criminal prosecutions.

Following an initial trial in 2021, SWR has introduced body-worn video cameras for colleagues in customer-facing roles, such as train guards and gateline assistants.The cameras, which are activated by the wearer and also capture 30 seconds of footage prior to full activation, can deter assaults and other anti-social behaviour, as well as collect video and audio evidence for use in future legal proceedings.

To warn potential perpetrators of the impact that abusing colleagues can have, both for them and for the colleague, SWR has launched a striking new poster campaign. These three new posters depict intimidating incidents of abuse from the perspective of a colleague, captured on a body-worn video camera. Each "perpetrator" is pictured superimposed on a background showing a figures in a police interview room, courtroom and prison call.

While it is hoped the posters will instil empathy for colleagues who face abuse, the backgrounds clearly show the possible consequences for the perpetrator: as they face police custody, trial and ultimately prison.

The campaign aims to prevent incidents by alerting potential perpetrators to the use of body-worn video cameras and reminding them of the potential consequences of such abuse.

A recent study, published by the University of Cambridge, commissioned by the Rail Delivery Group and BTP, suggested that body-worn video cameras can reduce the likelihood of assault against the wearer by as much as 47%.

Jane Lupson, Safety and Security Director for South Western Railway, commented:

"The rise in abuse directed against our colleagues, including daily assaults, is totally unacceptable and will not be tolerated. Keeping people safe on our railway is always our number one priority, not least our colleagues who serve our customers with care every day.

"The introduction of body-worn video cameras will help deter anyone thinking of abusing a colleague and help prosecute those who do.

"We hope this striking new campaign will remind potential perpetrators of the consequences of abuse, for colleagues and for them."

A Summer to Remember for More Devon Stations

Two new projects were celebrated at a special event at Crediton Station in August.

Both projects – the first focused on railway heritage, and the other on accessibility – were made possible thanks to Great Western Railway's Customer and Community Improvement Fund and the Community rail Development Fund.

The celebratory event started on Platform 2, where Crediton Mayor Steve Huxtable cut a ribbon to officially reopen the waiting room which now houses historic railway photographs and panels about the local rail network.

The displays have been put together by the Devon & Cornwall Rail Partnership (DCRP) with the help of local enthusiasts and photographers such as David Gosling and Roger Joanes. DCRP Manager Richard Burningham has supplied several items from his own collection.

Panels include the story of the famous Atlantic Coast Express, the 150th anniversary celebrations in 2001, the history of the Tarka Line, and the coming of the railway itself in 1851, illustrated with photographs supplied by the National Railway Museum.

The group then moved on to the Station Tea Rooms to celebrate the second project. The Turning Tides Project has leased Crediton Station Tea Rooms for the last six years, where the organisation has contributed to extensive refurbishment and work to make the space physically accessible for customers and employees.

The remaining barrier to equal access was relating to sound. With high ceilings, hard floors, kitchen equipment and, of course, passing trains, the space proved to be a challenging environment for people who are sensitive to sound. To combat this, the Turning Tides Project delivered a project that improved the acoustics of the building through a process of community and customer engagement.

The finished design incorporates sound boards and community-created artwork and furniture to create a more accessible and visually pleasing environment.

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

"This is a lovely project and thanks to everyone who has made it possible. I think the heritage displays are a very fitting local contribution to this year's Railway 200 celebrations which mark 200 years of the modern railway."

Emma Morris, Great Western Railway's senior community engagement manager, said:

"Our Customer & 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 have supported these two initiatives at Crediton Station."

Jane Williams, Director of the Turning Tides Project, said:

"Sound sensitivity is rarely on the list when 'access' is considered. The opportunity to change that was important to us. The completed design has made a striking difference to the Tea Rooms acoustics – we're really pleased with it. The visual impact of the design means that people ask about it – and that creates the opportunity for us to talk about sound sensitivity and equal access.

"We hugely value our ongoing relationships with GWR, Community Rail Network and the Devon & Cornwall Rail Partnership, and the enthusiasm with which they support what we do."

Also this summer, a new addition to the ever-increasing roster of community murals at stations came when a new artwork, created by pupils from Calstock Primary School, was unveiled at Plymouth Station.

The vibrant artwork is a collaboration between the Devon and Cornwall Rail Partnership, Cotehele National Trust and GWR.

Inspired by Cotehele's annual Blossom Festival, the piece was co-created by the pupils and artist Cathy Harrison. Using old magazines and junk mail, the children created colourful collages, inspired by the railway, Cotehele and blossom which have been woven together to form one large artwork.

Rebecca Catterall from the Devon and Cornwall Rail Partnership said:

"This project has been a fantastic collaboration with Cotehele and will not only really enhance the space at Plymouth station, but I hope it will inspire visitors to the station to visit the Tamar Valley and Cotehele."

Rebekah Mason, Senior Programming and Partnerships Officer at Cotehele said:

"We have been celebrating blossom in the Tamar Valley for several years now as it brings hope and light after the long winter. We hope this artwork brings joy to all who see it at Plymouth station."

GWR Senior Community Impact Manager, Emma Morris, said:

"We are thrilled to see this beautiful artwork come to Plymouth to showcase not only the beauty of the city, but also the creativity of all the children who have contributed to making it.

"It's been wonderful working together with the Devon and Cornwall Rail Partnership, and the National Trust to support the local community and see this idea come to life. I hope that this addition to the station will inspire people to hop on a train to visit the Tamar Valley and Cotehele."

Photographs by Devon and Cornwall Rail Partnership and GWR.

Installation of Plaque at Station Marks Culmination of Railway 200

Regular readers will remember that on the 165th anniversary of the opening of the railway line between Yeovil and Exeter, Richard Foord MP and Honiton's Mayor cut a special cake and unveiled a plaque as part of Railway 200, the year of celebration of our railways.

Huge thanks go to Keith Webber of SWR for installing the commemorative plaque in the entrance to the station, where it will be a constant reminder of this wonderful year of celebrations and of the long and successful history of our station.

New Vehicles Tackle Leaves on the Line - And Other Things…

Yes, it's that time of year again: leaves are browning, autumn is around the corner and Network Rail alongside South Western Railway (SWR) are gearing up for its annual multi-million-pound battle against Mother Nature and leaves on the line, aiming to keep millions of passengers and trains safe and moving over the next three months.

At first, passengers at Honiton thought that the Autumn season had come early, when trains were cancelled pretty much all day on Tuesday September 23rd, due to what SWR called "poor track conditions." In fact, an early morning westbound train had gone across a section of track contaminated with an unknown white substance, which then contaminated its wheels.

The result was that the driver found it increasingly difficult to pull away and to maintain line speed. When the train reached Cranbrook the train was unable to stop properly, even after the application of the emergency brake; the train overshot the platform by some distance.

Services were immediately suspended, with the affected train limping into Central Station, where it was to remain for several days. There was no way anyone was risking the train going down the slope into St David's. Unfortunately, it was well into the early evening before an appropriate vehicle could be dispatched by Network Rail to clear up the contaminated track, so that the line could be re-opened. Samples of the material found on the track were taken for analysis. The line reopened shortly after 6 p.m.

Returning to leaves on the line, Network Rail has invested over £100m to tackle this annual scourge for Britain's railways, and railways across the world - as damp, compressed leaves become the railway equivalent of black-ice on the road leading to slow running, delays and disruption.

Entering the fray is a new hero this season; 'Ctrl Alt Deleaf'! This leaf-kicking train - named by the public in a nationwide vote - will roll out for the first time next week from a depot at Effingham Junction, Surrey, where it's been showing off its flashy new autumn-themed look. Its mission, along with an entire fleet of similar leaf-busters, is to blast leaf-mulch off the rails – treating some 1.12 million miles over the autumn - to keep them clean and keep journeys running smoothly across the country.

This autumn, ‘Ctrl Alt Deleaf’ and its leaf-fighting partners will cover close to 170,000 miles, almost seven times around the earth, across the Wessex route, which connects London with Surrey, Hampshire, Dorset, Wiltshire, Somerset and Devon.

‘Ctrl Alt Deleaf’ beat thousands of other contenders in the nationwide vote and saw-off other worthy contenders like ‘Leaf-Fall Weapon’, ‘Pulp Friction’, and ‘The Autumn Avenger’, to grab the top spot with half the votes.

The name reveal follows a public competition in which more than 1,300 individual name nominations were submitted before being whittled down to a shortlist of four by a judging panel of railway historian, author and presenter Tim Dunn, Rail Minister, Lord Hendy, and Network Rail’s industry weather response director, Lisa Angus and then put to a public vote.

Speaking about the public vote, Tim Dunn said:

“It was fantastic to see so many members of the public get involved with naming a leaf-busting train. Thank you to everyone who took the time to submit a name and vote for a winner! The leaf-busting trains are a vital tool in Network Rail’s operation to tackle the impact of leaf fall on the railways. I'm delighted that the public has been able to honour these marvellous machines with such a fantastic name.”

This way of announcing the Autumn campaign, the use of a humorous and highly visible form of publicity, and the direct involvement of the public, is arguably a new direction for SWR - although clearly not for Network Rail. It is a welcome development, following the lead of other operators, and especially continuing the great work of the teams at Network Rail.

Network Rail and SWR are continuing to work together to tackle leaf fall this autumn and keep passenger journeys on track. Last year, 39 SWR Class 158 and 159 trains were fitted with SWR-inspired and Network Rail-funded sand-applying technology to boost rail adhesion in wet conditions. This system will be used again this autumn after a successful first year in service.

These advanced sand applicators can distribute up to 5kg of sand onto the tracks per minute, and automatically apply sand when a train is braking. As a result, the distance it takes a train to stop is significantly reduced.

Network Rail is also using a rail cleaner, Interflon LeafGuard, which is quick-acting and does not require rinsing or wiping. Applied either by hand or via a Sand Rover – a specially-adapted 4x4 Land Rover vehicle which can travel on rails and on the road and scrape leaf mulch off the tracks with specially mounted wire brushes – this solution self-cleans and leaves behind a micro layer that is reactivated by rainwater and moisture, keeping the rail head surface clean for longer.

Speaking on behalf of Network Rail and SWR, Operations Director Tom Desmond said:

“Leaves on the line get crushed onto the railway, becoming like black ice on the roads, lowering adhesion and impacting acceleration and braking. ‘Ctrl Alt Deleaf’ is an amusing name for a serious bit of kit, which will blast the rails with water to clear autumn leaf fall contamination.

“As well as our MPVs, we have a dedicated team in Basingstoke that coordinate our response making sure we can react to events. We also have teams on the ground using products to break down leaf site in high-risk sites. Throughout the autumn a whole sweep of mitigations are put in place to help keep passengers moving.”

Between October and December every year, roughly 500 billion leaves, weighing around half a million tonnes fall onto the railway. They stick to damp rails and passing trains crush them into a thin, hard layer on the rail which, a lot like black ice on the roads, can affect braking and acceleration. In areas with very heavy leaf-fall some train operators publish special autumn timetables with revised journey timings, including SWR which operates across Network Rail's Wessex route. These timetables allow extra time for train drivers to drive more cautiously due to the slippery conditions caused by leaf fall, ice and snow, so that they can get passengers to where they need to go safely and reliably.

SWR's Autumn Timetable began on Sunday September 21st, and will run until Saturday December 13th. The Reduced Timetable on the West of England Line, including the buses aimed at Exeter College students, will continue until further notice.

Exeter College 100-seater bus arrives back at Honiton on Thursday September 25th

Friends of Honiton Station Hold AGM and Coffee and Chat Session

The group held its latest Coffee and Conversation session on Monday September 29th, at Boston Tea Party. We took the opportunity to hold our AGM at the same time, as required by our constitution (which underpins our recognition agreement with SWR). Thanks to those who came along to talk about our hopes and plans for the year ahead. There are several important projects which we would very much like to see go ahead over the next year. A copy of the minutes of this meeting have been sent separately to all members, supporters and industry partners.