Trackbed Trails

The newsletter for Exmoor Associates Ltd Issue 25, Autumn 2020

Welcome to issue 25 of Trackbed Trails, a larger issue than usual, but we have a lot to report, hopefully to make up for being unable to have any physical meetings this year.

We now own Bratton Station!

Photo: Margaret Cameron
A smiling David Cameron with the keys to the station

The headline above says it all. I had feared having to write an introduction explaining the inordinate delays and letting you know that we had not pocketed the money and fled the country! Perhaps I should not be so cynical, but I do get the impression that COVID-19 is frequently being used as the modern equivalent of 'Elf and Safety' or 'Data Protection Act' excuse for not doing stuff ?
Having received the results of the searches from a previous would-be buyer of Long Acre, these were sent to our solicitor on 16 August. And after then, not a lot happened …
'Phone calls to the solicitor were usually met by an answering machine – and messages left, which were answered on an occasional basis!! She told me that the housing market is crazy at the moment as people rush to take advantage of the stamp-duty holiday; so much so, that her company was refusing to accept any new instructions for conveyancing!
Mr & Mrs Carpenter, the vendors of Long Acre, (or Bratton Fleming Station – henceforth BFS) were suffering similar delays. They are moving to Torridge, whose council informed them that they would be unable to complete any searches before early November! This did not suit them, as their insurance of LA / BFS fell due for renewal on 16 Oct - and they really didn't want to have to take our another year's policy. I told them that we were prepared to wait for them as long as necessary, and for this they were most grateful.
To add to the mix, Mr Carpenter was admitted to hospital early in October with a heart condition; we wish him a speedy recovery which, thankfully, he seems to be making.
Then, in mid-October we heard from the Carpenters that they would be taking out an indemnity policy against the uncompleted searches, and were aiming for a completion date in early November. It became a case of 'Game On'!!!
We were ready! The money was transferred to our solicitor on Tuesday 27 October and then a wait for the exchange of contracts which was scheduled for Monday 2 November , and completion the following day.

Whilst the drawn out sale was under way we were approached by EA shareholder and FOB member Andrew Naish asking if he could rent the station. Andrew has sold his house and so the station is to be his main residence; however, Andrew is also happy to hold open-days when other members may attend and view the property – once social distancing rules allow. He has paid his rent a year in advance which has greatly helped us to reach the asking price, for which we are most grateful.
Andrew's name might be familiar to some of you? When I was first told that he used to own '35005 Canadian Pacific', my first reaction was one of, 'Oh yes, I've got that Hornby model too!' …. until it was pointed out to me that it was the actual mainline Merchant Navy Class locomotive, most famous for carrying a striking blue livery. [See page two for a brief history of the locomotive.]

A full electrical inspection was required before the property could be let and this was done mid-October - and it was found that the wiring is in a woeful state. The most sensible solution is to bite the bullet and go for a full rewire, and this has been put in hand. It has been decided to allow enough spare capacity so if in future we wish to run platform lighting and so on.

Lastly it is with much sadness that I report the passing of Friend of Bratton and shareholder Richard Tinker of Leeds. Regretfully Richard did not live to see the station pass into railway friendly hands. Our thoughts and condolences go to his loved ones at this sad time.

David Cameron

This isn't strictly a relevant Exmoor Associates topic but for those interested - a bit of Locomotive history courtesy of the railwayhub and Watercress Line web sites and an excuse for some locomotive pictures

Canadian Pacific is now the oldest survivor of the Merchant Navy class. Built in 1941 at Eastleigh Works and painted in malachite green , the locomotive entered service on January 13, 1942 allocated to Exmouth Junction and was named at a ceremony at London's Victoria Station.

During its time on the Southern Railway, it was numbered 21C5. Renumbered 35005 upon Nationalisation, between March 1948 and April 1951 it was fitted with a Berkeley mechanical stoker and a speed recorder. The stoker system proved unreliable in everyday service, earning the 4-6-2 the nickname 'Canadian Pathetic' from crews and was removed in 1951.

In 1952, No. 35005 became one of the locomotives that took part in trials at Rugby's static test facility.

Although excellent performers, the Merchant Navy Class had numerous mechanical issues that necessitated a major rebuilding programme. In May 1959, No. 35005 returned to Eastleigh Works for its rebuild, which involved reverting many of the more novel features to those of more standard practice. The most noticeable visual change was the removing of the 'Spam Can' casing, resulting in a more conventional outline. There had been an incident in 1950 when the chain drive parted whilst travelling, destroying the oil bath and enclosed motion.

Withdrawn from Weymouth shed in 1965, it was sold to Woodham Bros in Barry in 1966. Rescued from the famous scrapyard in March 1973, it moved to the former Steamtown Museum at Carnforth, where its restoration began.

In 1989, No. 35005 was sold to Andrew Naish, who took it to the Great Central Railway, where it steamed in November 1990.

While visiting the Mid-Hants in 1996, Andrew repainted Canadian Pacific into the short-lived BR express passenger blue livery, which the class never carried in the rebuilt form. It carried this livery when it returned to the main line in 1998, operating out of Tyseley Locomotive Works, from where it hauled the summer Sunday 'Shakespeare Express'.

In January 2001, Marcus Robertson, founder of Steam Dreams, bought No. 35005, repainted it into BR green and it became a mainstay of the tour operator's 'Cathedrals Express' excursions.

For further information see:

https://www.therailwayhub.co.uk/10501/a-brief-history-of-canadian-pacific/

https://canpac.watercressline.co.uk/project/locomotive/timeline-of-canadian-pacific

Spam Can original build

Post 1959 rebuild

Can you help...

We are always looking for volunteers, whether it be for maintenance and improvement works on our trackbed sites, help with advertising and publicity or assistance with the ever increasing paperwork.

If you would like to get involved see the contact form on page six or email:

volunteers@exmoor-associates.co.uk

We welcome a new director to Exmoor Associates

We are pleased to announce that Paul Stileman has consented to join the board of directors. He writes a brief introduction to himself below.

My wife Rosemary and I have been shareholders since 2017 when we attended a fascinating lecture given by Mike Buse about Exmoor Associates!

My earliest contact with the L&B was when it had been closed only 30yrs and I walked part of it with my older sister who now lives in Pilton. I remember seeing soot staining on the bridges and the spell was cast then. I have been involved with restoration work on both steam and vintage motor cars since the age of 17 when I started with a small engineering company as "the boy". Over the years I have been co-director of an engineering company and also ran the AA's technical information service for a number of years. Steam projects have encompassed miniature locomotives and traction engines and also full size such as the Heywood locomotive "Katie" for the Eaton Hall railway. With the completion and sale of the last big project (a 5 ton Wallis steam waggon) 2years ago I am slowly "clearing the decks".

Photo: Rosemary Stileman

Since helping to extricate scrap locomotives from Barry in the late 60's I have built up a good network of contacts within the railway and engineering family and hope to use this to good effect for Exmoor Associates. Although living in Hampshire we spend as much time as possible in Devon as Rosemary also has family ties in the County, indeed if a suitable property came up.....!

For a short video clip see:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kBLnhs8dd9g

Andy Hearn reports on volunteer activity

This has been a strange year so far for all of us I'm sure and as such our last volunteer working day was Saturday March 21st. We had been concentrating on clearing the embankment at Collard bridge although during the lockdown and beyond this has regrown, albeit soft vegetation rather than a thicket of brambles, we haven't really got back into the swing of things but we have done the odd day over the last month or so sorting out flood damage at Snapper Halt when we had local heavy downpours and the road water washed down the path and washed away some banking at the back of the garage, clearing around the Halt and the car park. Also, the gate at the top of the Halt path had become rather tatty and having had a replacement made some time ago the opportunity was taken to get this painted up and put into place. The last work we have done is to move the new wagon into place (see page 4) and now it seems we will have to wait a few more weeks before we can restart our efforts.

Photo: Andy Hearn

At the time of writing this was another job on the volunteer job list.

The remains of a tree had washed down river and lodged under the pedestrian bridge at Snapper, close to the Blackwell's bridge end of the site. Unfortunately soon after this photo was taken the heavens opened and the river became too flooded for safe removal until it subsided and then lockdown 2....

Photo: Chris Bines

Our first item of rolling stock.

The search for a suitable permanent way wagon for Snapper had shown that decent vehicles in the right gauge were hard to come by. Re-gauging of wagons now cost about the same as the vehicle value effectively doubling the cost. Having approached quite a few narrow gauge railways and drawn a blank, I was very pleased to be invited by the Old Kiln Light railway to view a bogie coach chassis which had been used as a sleeper store for some time mostly under cover. This sprung chassis had originally been under a coach used on the Hayling Island railway and was in reasonable condition needing only a new deck and some TLC to fit the bill at Snapper.

Negotiations to reach the right price included a quantity of steam coal, delivered at each visit to prepare the wagon for it's new life. Arrangements were made with a helpful crane lorry firm and delivery took place on the 28th October. When pushed down the rails at Snapper, history was remade!

Paul Stileman

Andy Hearn takes up the narrative...

Having been informed of the acquisition of our new wagon I liaised with new director Paul Stileman, who was arranging the transport of the wagon from Tilford in Surrey, about a suitable day for delivery, Wednesday 28 October was the decided day and at some time between 7 and 8 am Paul had loaded the wagon and sent it on its way to its new home in Devon, nicely scribbled on the frame were the words 'P.W.DEPT,SNAPPER.

Having been informed of its arrival I headed down to Snapper for 11.45 am when quite timely the wind got up to a good gale and the heavens opened giving us horizontal rain just as the wagon arrived, the driver reversed into our car park and in no time at all the wagon had been unloaded at its new home.

Photo: Andy Hearn

purchase, transporting and positioning on the tracks of this wagon, a very good job done indeed.

There is still some work to do on the wagon,the frame needs painting and a new timber deck needs to be fitted, until this is all completed she will be kept under wraps and then she will be shown off for all to see.....and of course,it would be nice if one day she could travel a little further along the Yeo valley.

Photo: Andy Hearn

Arrangements were then made by Mike B for local contractors A&B to come down on the Saturday with a telehandler to move the wagon down to the track to the Halt.

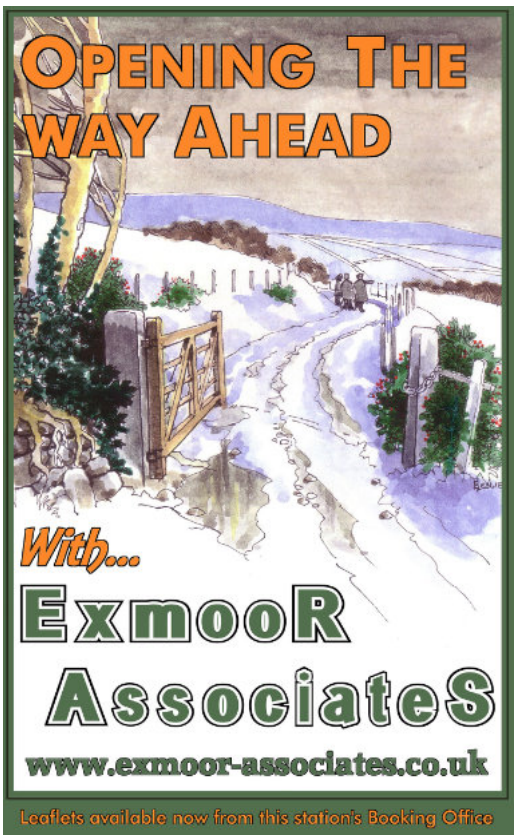
Saturday morning turned out to be a little damp again but this time the sun actually decided to shine on us as we dismantled the wagon into its separate components of the bed and the two bogies. Within a couple of hours both bogies were in place on the track and the bed was lowered back into place on top of them, it was surprising how easy it was to move the wagon along the line and quite a defining moment to think that we had rolling stock trundle past the Halt building for the first time probably since the original line was lifted. I would like to thank everyone involved in the sourcing,

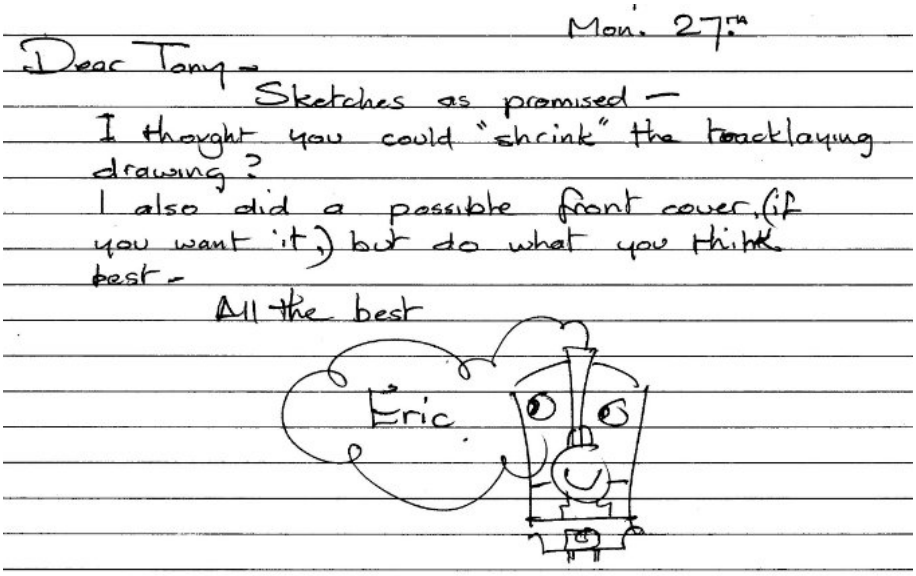
Photo: Andy Hearn

Eric Leslie

You will probably have heard that artist and great supporter of many railways, Eric Leslie passed away on 30th August 2020. Eric who lived in Barnstaple had a long standing and active interest in the Lynton & Barnstaple railway and the work Exmoor Associates is doing to secure the trackbed. Below is reproduced a poster Eric did for us in 2007 for display at Woody Bay station. I am grateful to have known Eric, he was always supportive and went out of his way to be helpful. His notes to me and Mike Buse were always signed with his trademark smiley faced engine and those of you who were around at the time of “Friends of Chelfham” will recall the letterhead below that was used for the regular newsletters.

Tony Brown




Mon. 27th

Dear Tony –

Sketches as promised –

I thought you could "shrink" the tracklaying drawing?

I also did a possible front cover, (if you want it) but do what you think best –

All the best

Eric

Mike remembers

Eric Leslie, an extraordinary man, passed away 30th August 2020 aged 83. I realised from the very first time I met Eric that we had someone very special when he arrived on the Lynton & Barnstaple Railway. A very quietly spoken man but with fabulous stories from his past involvement as a volunteer with the Ffestiniog Railway restoring carriages and wagons also working on the deviation project amongst many other things.
Back in 1993 whilst Eric was still living in Sheffield he painted artwork for the cover of the very first L & B Christmas Card and for many Christmas Cards after that. Eric added so much to the L & B with his paintings sketches his many ideas, I knew if I just mentioned something to him he would without fail provide the answer.
One example was in the parlour at Woody Bay Station. I was very keen to try to show what a lovely building we had, so after advice we put up a dado rail with Lincrusta paper below the rail and plain painted walls above along

with a period style wooden fire place surround. We watched every penny so after I mentioned to Eric that it would be nice to have a clock on the mantlepiece but funds could not stretch that far, he didn't say anything but turned up one day and painted a clock on the wall with the time of the last train, not content with that he added a vase and a spill vase as well.
The next time I was at Woody Bay Eric had painted a mock calendar beside the fire place surround with the date of the last train, with some regular volunteers portrayed in adverts on the calendar. Absolutely tremendous, the faces of those volunteers when they saw they had been represented was priceless.
Eric was a first class carpenter and could often be found in the railway workshop at Bratton Fleming helping Les Driver with the various tasks we kept finding for him. Eric designed and fitted out the first class section of one of the ex-Thorpe Park coaches, building the seating and supplying the art work.
So many memories of a truly remarkable man, someone I will never forget and I know so many people that came into contact with him feel the same way.
Eric did artwork for many other railways and other organisations, we are sure they will all miss him as much as we do.

Mike Buse

Past and Present....

Rayleigh Weir bridge in 1964 in a photo taken by Michael Bishop. The deck is missing but all the piers are intact. Compare it with a recent photo where other than a few bricks on the river bed nothing remains of the bridge.

Photo: Michael Bishop

Photo: Tony Brown

....and Future

Something to watch out for, coming next year on Channel 5.

One of Rob Bell's forgotten railway walks on Channel 5 features scenery some of you may be familiar with.

Look out for series 3 coming some time in 2021.

Photo: Rob Sadd

WANT TO GET IN TOUCH?

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