The newsletter for Exmoor Associates CIC Issue 30, November 2021

Report of the meeting held on 25 September 2021 at Goodleigh

Mike Buse opened the meeting with apologies from a number of shareholders who were unable to attend including EA director David Cameron from whom Mike read out the following statement.

"May I say how much I regret to be missing this meeting - and the L&B Gala … but sadly it clashes with not one, but two, weddings this weekend where my attendance is expected – the first today in Suffolk – and the second tomorrow in Birmingham; clearly Margaret's family has no sense of occasion, otherwise they would have chosen different weekends!

I am especially sorry not to be able to meet all those of you who donated to the appeal I co-ordinated last year to buy Bratton Fleming, and to thank each of you personally.

Your generosity was simply staggering, and I hope you feel it was worthwhile when you visit the station later this weekend.

Several of you I knew already, but a good number are names which were new to me, and I was hoping to be able to put faces to names – and to welcome you all to the EA 'family'.

Very regretfully, two who donated to the appeal have already passed away, and I am particularly sad that they never got to see the station that they helped secure; perhaps you could take a moment to remember them? *Peter Randall* and *Richard Tinker*; and to those who made contributions in memory of passed loved-ones, I hope you will agree that Bratton Fleming Station is a very special place.

In closing, I should like to thank all my fellow EA directors for their help and support who, when it became clear that *Friends of Bratton* was not going to reach the purchase price in the time available to us, [helped] to bridge the gap, and bring the project to a successful conclusion."

A number of shareholders had requested that there should be a debate over the current problems the L&B Trust was having with voting procedures. Mike informed the assembly that the meeting was strictly for issues regarding EA but acknowledged that there had been concerns raised on how this was affecting Exmoor Associates. It was announced that after the official EA meeting there would be an open forum with an independent chairman to discuss these issues.

Tony Brown gave a short update in the company's status, the number of shareholders now stood at 429 with a total CIC asset value of £589,584. Because there had been some confusion expressed by members over the workings of EA CIC compared with the L&B CIC,Tony explained that EA shareholders own the assets of the company whereas the L&B CIC is a wholly owned subsidiary of the L&B Trust with Trust members having been given voting rights whilst they remain members.

Charles Gardner was then invited to address the meeting as chairman of The Barnstaple and Yeo Valley Charitable Trust (from here on referred to as the YVT). Charles gave a broad outline of the YVTs plans for the route south of Wistlandpound particularly at Barnstaple. He particularly stressed the importance of getting Barnstaple council and local residents "on board" and posed such open questions as "How to engage with the local community?" or "How to substantiate the economic benefits a railway operating from Pilton Yard would bring?".

Charles mentioned the Mary Portas government report "https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-portas-review-the-future-of-our-high-streets" as being relevant to the future development of Barnstaple. He acknowledged that potentially there may be a sizeable opposition to the railway in Barnstaple but also if a positive case could be made for it grants might be available for affected communities.

Charles went on to introduce some other YVT trustees Mike Buse, John Buck the YVT's treasurer and Tony Hobbs (unable to be present but Mike read out the following letter of apology)

"An unavoidable visit to family in Scotland means that I shall be missing a milestone gathering in the long journey to rebuild the L&B Railway in the Yeo Valley.

Mike and his colleagues, with the generous support of shareholders over 20 years, has achieved the near impossible target of acquiring lengths of trackbed extending from the Wistlandpound Diversion in the North to the outskirts of Barnstaple in the South.

The final challenge now is to fill in gaps and secure the route into Pilton Yard. What you, the growing number of shareholders, have demonstrated is that when the financial need arises your response is remarkable. The successful purchase of Bratton Fleming Station is the latest great achievement.

With the transformed structure of the EA and YVT partnership led by Mike and Charles as Chairmen, it has become possible to raise charitable funds through donations and legacies with the benefits of gift-aid and tax concessions, thereby enhancing your contributions by 25%. The Trustees can use these funds to enable EA to purchase more trackbed when the opportunity arises, or to begin the reconstruction of the surviving historic structures along the route, commencing now with the station layout at Bratton plus the rebuilding of the Goods Shed.

For the near future I personally hope to continue to make a small contribution to progressing our project as Charles' Vice Chairman, but for today I must leave you in the capable hands of the Directors of Exmoor Associates and the Trustees of the Yeo Valley Trust."

John Buck then went on to explain that the YVT was in the process of establishing a new bank account to enable electronic banking to be carried but between the bank and solicitors this was becoming a protracted procedure.

From the floor Charles was asked if the intention was to build a railway in the southern sector. He replied that it was not in the foreseeable future plans but the the YVT would encourage development of currently owned trackbed and stations to enhance the overall public benefit. To illustrate this he showed plans currently being drawn up to build a replica goods shed at Bratton Station on the original footprint. This would give EA a permanent base, provide storage for equipment and enhance the railway character of Bratton. In answer to another question Charles reiterated that engagement with local councils and residents would be the key to success.

In Trackbed Trails 29 the question was posed with two options;

"That subscribed funds for shares are retained by EA in a ring fenced account solely for use in the purchase of additional trackbed and that other community based projects are funded via donations (which attract Gift Aid) to the Yeo Valley Trust."

Or

"That EA expands its remit so that all funds held can be used for any purpose covered in our Articles."
Communications received before the meeting were unanimously in favour of the first option and when the question was put to the assembled meeting the response was the same.

This therefore is the current position;
Funds paid to Exmoor Associates via cheques, standing orders or other means will be assumed to be designated to be for the ring fenced trackbed purchase fund and in due course shares will be issued for such contributions unless we are advised that it is a donation for expenses, postage or other purposes.

Donations towards ancillary projects such as the goods shed at Bratton Station are best made directly to the YVT using the following details;

The Yeo Valley Trust, 152 Florence Road, Wimbledon, London, SW19 8TN or by direct transfer to Lloyds sort code 30-99-66 Account 28082260. Please note however that as mentioned above the account details are likely to change in the near future although the banks usually arrange automatic redirection.

Current projects for donations are Bratton Goods shed (Planning application and construction), roof finials (See page 4) reinstatement of the original post box at Bratton Station and further cosmetic track extension at Snapper. Please make clear if you wish a donation to be for a specific purpose.

A question from the floor of the meeting was “Are Exmoor Associates shares transferable?” The answer is definitely “Yes” and is something we would ask all shareholders to include in any will they make. Ideally we would like to see shares transferred to an enthusiastic relative or friend but failing that donated to the YVT. Such a donation would be exempt from Inheritance Tax and enable the YVT to increase its current small shareholding which at some future point would enable the YVT to assist EA in a major asset purchase.
Andy Hearn gave the meeting a brief summary of volunteer activity since the last meeting which had inevitably been minimal due to the Covid restrictions. He also reported that he has been in touch with Maggie Curtis a ceramic artist from Appledore who has been commissioned to make two replica finials. (See reports on page 4).
In response to a question from the floor asking why there had been a poor relationship between Exmoor Associates / YVT and the L&B Trust /CIC, Tony Brown explained that it related to unfounded historic allegations made from when Mike Buse was the L&B chairman and Tony Brown finance director. These, although resolved, had created an undesirable lack of cooperation in the past.
Relationships between the four organisations was now more cordial which was endorsed by Charles Gardner and John Buck from the YVT.
Mike Buse introduced Anne Belsey, a director of the L&B CIC and EA shareholder who has been assisting in inter-company communications.

Mike thanked the members preparing lunch, Tony and Jackie Williams, Rosemary Stileman, Jenny Driver and Sue Buse.
Chris Duffell who was standing for election to the L&B Trust gave a brief resume of his background. He has been preparing and currently Project Managing all the work required to deliver the Railway’s Transport and Works Act Order (TWAO) including liaison with our Parliamentary Lawyers and preparing all the land registration details.
Mike Buse advised the meeting that another trackbed purchase was currently with our solicitors and that hopefully full details could be published soon.

Paul Stileman

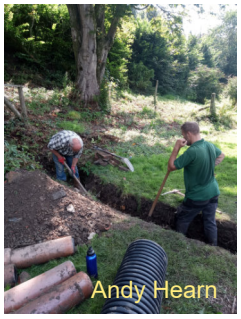
Regrettably Paul has resigned as a director of Exmoor Associates for personal reasons. We would like to thank him for his past input particularly regarding mechanical and engineering issues.

Maintenance Work at Snapper Halt

There is a drain at the southern end of the Snapper Halt platform, that takes road water under the formation, unfortunately it was only a small drain and was unable to cope with the runoff from the road, regularly flooding the trackbed and generally making a mess.

Seeing that we have been enjoying some dry weather it was decided to replace the drain for a larger model and give the Snapper navvies some 'proper' physical work to do.

Once digging and removal of the glazed pipes was underway we found that another drain was underneath, this one had in fact collapsed a long time ago and the drain we were removing was obviously a replacement laid on top. Having removed both old drains a new larger pipe was laid a little deeper, all that needs to be done now is construct a new catchment bowl at the top end and rebuild the stone walling at the outflow end. *Rob Sadd*



Rob Sadd and Graham Lee hard at work at Snapper Halt

Bratton Station Bits

Mike Buse

Mike Buse has collected the Victorian post box kindly donated by Richard Deane.

We used the box to collect money towards the new Bratton Goods Shed over the open days weekend. (£70 was raised)

David Cameron has now taken delivery of the display board acknowledging those who contributed towards the purchase of the station. It will soon be installed in a permanent position at the station.

David Cameron

Following the purchase of Bratton Fleming Station, it is our intention to gradually return more original railway-related features to the station. Some of the first items to be tackled are the two large ornamental roof finials which were originally fitted (and which can be seen on old photographs).
These were lost/broken some time ago, but Andy Hearn is not discouraged by such minor problems. Andy located pieces of the originals in different places in the garden and then found a ceramic specialist who was capable of creating replacements. After little persuasion she agreed to create replicas of the originals.

Even better, the ceramic specialist is located locally in Appledore. Her name is Maggie Curtis and you can see pictures of her previous work on her website https://www.maggiecurtis.co.uk.

Michael Bishop supported the effort by supplying sketches with measurements that he had made, along with photos of the original finials in situ on the roof.

Andy delivered the pieces of the original finials, along with the photos and drawings, to Maggie Curtis some weeks ago and she is now well on in the process of replicating the finials, which will take 8-12 weeks.

Photos Andy Hearn

These are not cheap of course (being handmade) but will be a great addition to the station when completed and fitted. The cost is in the region of £500 for the pair and any donations to help fund this and other Bratton station improvements/ restoration would be appreciated. Donations can be made through the YVT (See penultimate paragraph on page 2).
Phil Heathcote

Some edited feedback from visits to Bratton Station over the weekend of 25th/26th

Yes it was a delightful visit to Bratton Fleming station and to be able to walk on the platform and the track bed. I have to say that Andrew Naish has done a wonderful job in keeping the whole site very clean and tidy. It was also good to hear Andrew's enthusiasm with regards to transforming the station and track bed back to be ready to take the track again. I certainly agree that the reinstatement of the building over the siding should take place and be to the same original design. *Keith Morton*

I enjoyed my visit to Bratton Fleming Station. I was made very welcome and given a full tour of the site and the location of the proposed Goods Shed.I agree in principle that to engage with local communities along the length of the line we should where appropriate allow public access..

Thank you for the Fridge Magnet. *Roger Beazer*

I very much enjoyed my visit. Maybe we could have another next year? I know of at least two who couldn't come.I was made very welcome, had some nice chats. My wife was thrilled with EA; she hadn't really taken its existence on board until the meeting and the site visit.I support the proposed workshop in place of the garage and shed. I await the call for funds.

There wasn't really an obvious fund raiser for the finials, just a hint that one could help, so I ended up just putting some cash into the postbox. *Jo Roesen*

Good meeting on the 25th - although I have rarely managed to attend since becoming a member in 2008(?) - I learnt a lot on the 25th.

I would say that we were certainly made to feel most welcome at Bratton Fleming and, on behalf of all those EA Members who visited, I would like to offer my sincere thanks: it was lovely to be able to take a non-time restrained look around our latest acquisition and to be so very warmly hosted by someone who was clearly a committed fellow enthusiast! First impressions? - a truly sylvan setting which is just awaiting to be reawakened by the railway's return.

Goods Shed - yes, a good idea and also a significant milestone in marking/extending our presence on our acquired real estate. This can only be a positive statement if our future intent. Even better if we can get a bit of track down. *Richard Randall*

Really enjoyed the weekend and fully support the restoration of BF station to its original state. The goods yard is an excellent idea - it would make a great meeting place and conference centre.The inclusion of a small workshop would also make sense. *Jamie Teeling*

Impressed by the welcome [from Andrew Naish], especially the badge! Found the walk to the south very eye opening, you can see why they went well over budget, all that rock to blast out.

The reinstatement of the goods shed is a good idea , we must make the work of our maintenance team as easy as possible.

Please make sure we have funds available for the purchase of the south end of the site, it will make it a showcase for our group. *John Crouchman*

The Goods Shed Project

As mentioned at the meeting plans are being drawn up by Charles Gardner to rebuild the goods shed on the existing footprint. The next issue of Trackbed Trails will have further details of this project together with news on trackbed purchases (and how you can help!).

A.B. MacLeod

Keith Morton

The photo above left shows the goods shed after the track to it had been lifted. The plan left shows the goods shed top left. Notice that both the plan and the archive photograph show the ground falling away sharply to the left whereas in the recent photo above the site has been levelled.

Get in Touch

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