The newsletter for Exmoor Associates CIC Issue 32 April 2022

REMINDER - OUR NEXT MEETING

Our annual May meeting will be held on May 14 at our usual venue Goodleigh Village Hall EX32 7LU.

The hall doors will open at 9.30 am when there will be tea, coffee and biscuits available, the meeting commences at 10.00 am.

All interested non-shareholders and volunteers are welcome to attend the meeting.

The L&B Trust is holding a gala over the weekend of 14-15 May including its AGM in the evening.

We have arranged visits to Bratton Fleming Station on Sunday May 15 between 10am and 4pm and a trackbed walk on Saturday afternoon along the newly purchased Higher Hunnacott trackbed that was detailed in Trackbed Trails 31. In view of the ongoing Omicron variant infections we would ask that if you are feeling unwell and suspect you may be infectious please do not attend.

A light lunch of rolls etc will be available after our meeting for the modest sum of £5.00, please confirm if you intend staying for lunch and socialising to give our caterers an idea of numbers.

URGENT HELP NEEDED FOR NEW TRACKBED PURCHASES

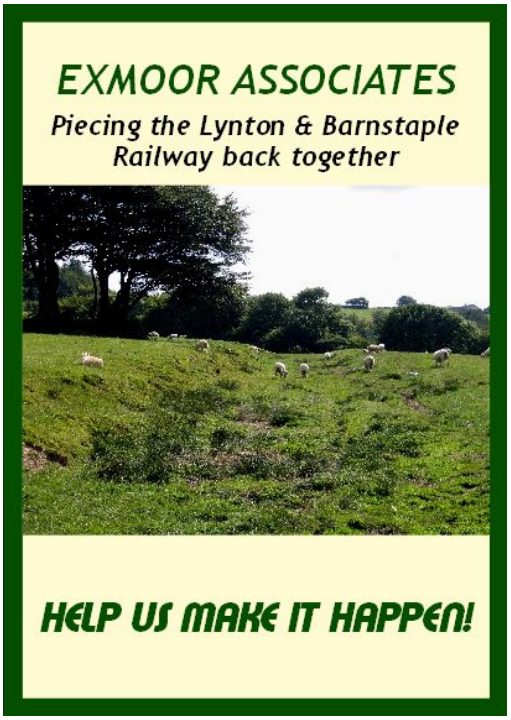
There is a well established saying that you wait ages for a bus then three come along at once. It seems that in our case a similar position exists with the acquisition of trackbed.

We have now been offered three parcels of trackbed, all of which connect with sections we already own and will give us a considerable unified length of the route.

Inevitably this leaves us very short of funds to complete all three purchases hence we are launching a new appeal for contributions.

There are two ways for you to contribute, by a direct purchase of shares or, if you are a UK taxpayer, by a donation to the Yeo Valley Trust specifying that it is intended for trackbed purchases. In the latter case the YVT can claim an extra 25% via gift aid but note that the shares will be held in the name of the YVT not of the donor.

Enclosed with this posting is a form for share purchases by either method, please help if you can, we know that this is very ambitious coming so soon after the purchase of the trackbed at Hunnacott farm but we feel that this is an opportunity we cannot afford to miss.



BRATTON FLEMING & TOM SPINK

The eagle-eyed among those who have visited Bratton Fleming Station last year may have noticed a small memorial stone, beneath a tree at the edge of the property?

It is in memory of one Tom Spink - but who was he?

A Google search on the name led to the offices of Slee Blackwell Solicitors in Braunton where, it seemed, certain papers concerning Tom Spink were lodged - on behalf of the Exmoor Society. The solicitor's receptionist was, while very friendly, unable to help with files now around sixty years old; so she suggested an approach directly to the Exmoor Society themselves who, she described as being a very active organisation.

So contact with the Exmoor Society was made to see if they could throw any light as to why a Tom Spink might be commemorated at Bratton?

And a helpful reply was received.

It appears that Tom Spink lived in the adjoining Quarry House in the 1960s (and Tom seems to have been a friend of Henry Skinner, who lived in the former station around the same time - according to Henry's book, *King of the Valley*).

Tom Spink is mentioned in the minutes of the 1967 AGM of the Exmoor Society, held in October of that year, a copy of which they kindly sent me.

The report of the meeting from the Exmoor Review 1968 states ….

The Annual General Meeting

The ninth Annual General Meeting of the Society was held on 21st October, 1967, at the County Secondary School, Bampton.

From 10.30 a.m. members arrived for the morning session. They came from north, south, east and west; and indeed some enthusiastic members seemed to think nothing of travelling as far as 200 miles to be present, such is their devotion to the Society and the cause which it serves.

Members visiting the room containing maps and book on Exmoor and other interesting literature were delighted to discover that Tom Spink was also on show, in charge of the display, his departure to New Zealand having been delayed, happily at least for the Society. Charles Whybrow was at hand to deal with the more abstruse enquiries on archaeological and antiquarian matters. The Membership Secretary, Miss Chilcott, was present to answer questions about subscriptions and to enrol new members. In another part of the building, Victor Bonham-Carter had arranged an exhibition of pastel paintings of Exmoor by his friend, Hellmuth Weissenborn. These paintings, characteristic and evocative of Exmoor in all its aspects, created much interest among members. The Society's Land Use Map of Exmoor, revised and brought up-to-date, was on display, and Geoffrey Sinclair was available for information about it.

The afternoon session was opened by the President of the Society, the Bishop of Bath and Wells, to whom the Society is much indebted for his keen interest and support. After a short but felicitous speech of welcome to members and their friends, the President handed a painting of Exmoor to Tom Spink, on his retirement from the Honorary Secretaryship. Members of the Society had subscribed to the testimonial to 'Tom' as a mark of their gratitude and esteem, for it was largely as a result of his immense energy, unsparingly devoted to the affairs of the Society, and his great administrative talents, that the situation he had inherited had been transformed, and the Exmoor Society had developed into a large and influential body.

Following the presentation …..

So, from this we discover that Tom Spink had in fact been secretary of the Exmoor Society for some time up until October 1967 (and was a very good one by all accounts) - and was on the point of leaving the UK, to begin a new life in New Zealand.

Incidentally, the Victor Bonham Carter mentioned here, is of the same family as the actress, Helena.

One can only imagine to sense of sadness felt by Henry Skinner at the imminent loss of his colleague and neighbour, as Tom Spink prepared to leave for the antipodes, and perhaps it was he who planted the tree in his friend's memory?

David Cameron

REPORT FROM THE VOLUNTEER GROUP

The Snapper navvies have been busy in the Yeo valley, apart from scrub clearance which stopped back at the beginning of March due to the bird nesting season.

New recruit Phil along with Rob have filled in a gully by the garage which was washed out a while ago by a torrential downpour, rubble from the car park site was moved down to the garage and has been stacked and packed into the hole, the garage roof ridge has also seen some attention.

Graham and I have been to Collard Bridge, replacing the splayed fence on one side of the bridge which had collapsed due to old age, the other side is still holding out but will need to be replaced at sometime in the future.

A piece of drainpipe has been fitted through the road hedge bank hopefully to reduce road surface water from running down the Halt path, all being well this pipe will be finished by the time you read this.

Andy Hearn

THE RUSTON DIESEL

In Trackbed Trails 31 we promised an update on the Ruston Diesel which is currently in the Davis brothers workshop in Suffolk, but that has now been held over to the next issue.

We have just heard that it is shortly to be moved to a working railway for testing giving us some photographic opportunities. A full illustrated history will be published in Trackbed Trails 33.

HERITAGE RAILWAY ASSOCIATION

We are pleased to announce that from March this year we have been members of the Heritage Railway Association and we look forward to being active members of the Association in the future. Mike Buse attended the annual HRA awards meeting in Birmingham on 19/03/2022 to support Neal and Nigel Davis' entry regarding the restoration of the Ruston locomotive.

Mark Smith, Heritage Railway Association Director and former Managing Director of the West Somerset Railway, will be at our meeting on the 14 May to give us an insight into what the HRA does and how it can help our organisation.

Henry Skinner book "King of the Valley"

Henry at home, 1970.

Regular readers may recall that in Trackbed Trails 26 we mentioned the above booklet written by Henry Skinner who lived in Bratton Fleming Station in the 1970's. We were contacted by Peter Ashcroft from Yelland who kindly donated a signed copy of Henry Skinner's book of poems.
Supporter and shareholder Jim Harle has commissioned a limited reprint of this which will be available from Andrew Naish at Bratton station for a small (or large!) donation to Exmoor Associates CIC.

Change of Registered Office

You may notice that in the 'Get in Touch' box below the registered office of the company has been changed to Bratton Fleming station. This is a legal change at Companies House, cheques (always welcome) and general correspondence should continue to be sent to the company secretary at Edgemoor, Moorland Close, YELVERTON, PL20 6DD

Can You Help?

Exmoor Associates CIC, in common with many "not for profit" organisations relies on all the directors and participants in working parties volunteering their time (and often expertise) to keep the company active.

If you can assist with any of the following you would be most welcome:

Bookkeeping, finance, share issues and Companies House returns, publicity, publications, web site maintenance, landscaping and maintenance of our various sites.

At the moment all of the above are being covered by a handful of volunteers many of whom have been involved in various Lynton & Barnstaple Railway roles over many years and are past their prime.

If you feel you can inject some new blood into our organisation please let us know.

Get in Touch

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