

## History of Honiton Station Captured to Mark 160th Anniversary



*The official launch of the new booklet on October 20 at Allhallows Museum. (L-R): Richard Birmingham, Martin Long, Dan Wright and Margaret Lewis. Picture: Nick Boggan*

October 20 saw the launch of a project by The Friends of Honiton Station to celebrate the 160th anniversary of the railway line through East Devon. Although they were not able to mark the actual anniversary in July because of the lockdown, the group planned to mount a display of photographs at the station and to issue a commemorative booklet telling the history of the station as soon as restrictions were lifted sufficiently. The booklet was researched and written by the Chairman, Martin Long. The display is now on show in the station waiting room and includes several photographs from the extensive collection held by Allhallows Museum in Honiton, including a picture taken of the front of the station in 1907.

The illustrated booklet tells the story of Honiton Station, beginning in 1851 when the townsfolk of Honiton signed a petition demanding that the Mayor call a public meeting to discuss how best to campaign for a railway line through the town. Plans had already been drawn up, but they would have led to the railway passing south of Honiton, which would have been left at the end of a short branch line, cut off from a direct route to Exeter or to London. The town's two MPs were dispatched with a small delegation to lobby the railway company to bring the railway through Honiton.

The first train pulled into Honiton on July 18, 1860. Ominously, as the train arrived through the pouring rain, there was a solar eclipse. The ill omens proved accurate. Two weeks later a train derailed near Feniton, causing part of the line to be seriously damaged. However, it was quickly rebuilt. And remarkably, considering how long it took to build the extended passing loop at Axminster ten years ago, the whole route from Salisbury to Exeter which opened as a single-track railway, was converted to double track in only a year. One of the greatest features of the line though East Devon is Honiton tunnel. It cost £70,000 to build - more than £8.5 million today - and is lined with 11 million bricks.

The commemorative booklet was funded by the Devon and Cornwall Rail Partnership and South Western Railway who now operate the line. Partnership Manager, Richard Burningham, said: "We are delighted to be able to help the Friends of Honiton Station celebrate the 160th anniversary of the opening of the Yeovil to Exeter railway and with it, Honiton station. This is a period of many significant local railway anniversaries. In December, it will be five years since Cranbrook Station opened, and next May it will be fifty years since Sidmouth Junction reopened as Feniton, one of the first Beeching closures to be reversed."

South Western Railway have supported the project by installing a new display frame for the historical photographs. Their Community Rail Manager, Andy Harrowell said: "Whilst it has been a hard year for our station adopters, it's been lovely to see the Friends of Honiton use the time constructively to progress the work on this booklet, as well as setting up a newsletter to keep its members informed and a website to promote themselves further in the area. We are sure that our passengers and the local community will enjoy learning more about the station through the booklet and the display in our waiting room."



*View of Honiton Station in 1907. (Allhallows Museum by kind permission of the Trustees)*

Also present at the official launch of the booklet on was Dan Wright from the Community Rail Network, which supports and advises Station Adoption Groups such as The Friends of Honiton Station. He added: "Community Rail is all about connecting communities with their railways, just as those connections were first forged 160 years ago. It's great to see The Friends of Honiton celebrating and publicising the history of their local station and explaining its importance to the town, not to mention finding a way of using the difficult period of lockdown to progress this valuable project."

Copies of the free booklet were presented to the curator of Allhallows Museum, Margaret Lewis. They are now available from the Museum shop on Tuesdays and Saturdays from 10am to 2pm.

## HONITON STATION A HISTORY IN PICTURES



FREE BOOKLET  
*A Short History  
of Honiton Station*  
AVAILABLE NOW

Chair of "The Friends of Honiton Station", Martin Long said: "I hope that many local people will collect a copy of the booklet, and read all about their station. It has a long and fascinating history, as well as an exciting future if plans for a new twice-hourly service to Exeter ever come to fruition. We are grateful to everyone who has supported this project to mark the anniversary, including South Western Railway and the Devon and Cornwall Rail Partnership. I am especially grateful to Allhallows Museum for giving me access to their archives, and for making these booklets available in their shop. Hopefully, lots of people will visit the Museum shop and help keep this amazing local resource going at what is an incredibly difficult time for them."