



## SPRING 2026 NEWSLETTER

*Welcome to our Spring Newsletter.*

Just as our previous Newsletter was published, celebrations were underway for the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of modern train travel. The star of the show was a working replica of Locomotion No.1, the first steam locomotive to haul a public passenger train at the opening of the Stockton & Darlington Railway on 27<sup>th</sup> September 1825. Only 35 years later, on 1<sup>st</sup> November 1860, a rather more advanced design of locomotive and rolling stock opened the Dorset Central Railway between Wimborne and Blandford. In this Newsletter we look back at the earliest days of Spetisbury station.



Replica of Locomotion No.1  
(photo courtesy of Steven Mitcheson)



The opening of the Dorset Central Railway, showing the arrival of the first train at Blandford St Mary. The locomotives are *Minerva* and *Mars*, both designed by Joseph Hamilton Beattie, who was among the dignitaries on board the train (artwork courtesy of Felicity Baker)



We have recently gained some excellent publicity thanks to a new film uploaded to YouTube, as well as a magazine article. Both were produced with the cooperation of Spetisbury Station Project.

To view the 16-minute film, search for **Paths To The Past** on [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com). Producer John Broom also shared this colourised image of the station with us.

Also be sure to look out for Issue 581 of

**Steam Railway** magazine, published on 5<sup>th</sup> March, which features a two-page article by Richard Gunn all about Spetisbury, as well as other Somerset & Dorset railway locations to mark the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the line's closure on 6<sup>th</sup> March 1966.

At the beginning of September, three of our volunteers refixed the edging slab at the end of the 'up' platform ramp, which had become loose and had started to slide out of position. The first job was to jack-up this heavy stone slab, then carefully rake out the crumbling mortar. A bed of fresh mortar was then applied before gently lowering the slab back into position. Visitors to the station will have noticed that many similar stone slabs along the length of this platform are missing. These were long gone before the Spetisbury Station Project started work in 2012, and we have heard that many can be found today in gardens around the village! In time we would like to replace these missing slabs with new ones, but this would be a difficult and costly job.



On 6<sup>th</sup> December, the North Dorset Railway and Dorset Council Rangers organised a work party to clear the overgrowth from Charlton Marshall Halt. Two of our volunteers, Jon and Carl, went along to help. This was the next station up the line from Spetisbury, but there were no passenger facilities at all, in fact the station looks more-or-less how it would have done when trains were still running.

Our **Christmas at the Station** took place on Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> December. Thankfully, the weather stayed dry and fine as we did not have use of our gazebo that day. Our lady volunteers did us proud once again, with Frances and Liz serving warming mulled wine, Diane dishing up delicious hot dogs and Anne provided her lovely home-made cakes and savouries. Our popular, regular performers the Blandford Ukulele Group provided some festive tunes and Graham and his team from the North Dorset Railway was also on hand to give out information. The selection of pre-owned railway books, DVDs and paintings also proved popular. Thank you to everyone who donated items for us to sale or came along to support us on the day.



warming up with mulled wine



fine weather brought lots of visitors



the hotdogs went down a treat as well



Blandford Ukulele Group



We have also now set-up an online donations page at [www.justgiving.com/crowdfunding/spetisbury](http://www.justgiving.com/crowdfunding/spetisbury) together with a QR code, as many visitors do not carry cash. We have various improvements planned for this year, including repainting the fencing around the signal box and wildlife pond, constructing a new children's log train and providing more information panels and signs around the station. All monies raised will be put to good use funding this work.

The wet weather at the start of the year hampered the first few work parties, but when we finally got started one of the first jobs was to repair a breach in the fence behind the 'up' platform which separates the station from the adjacent farmer's field.

On 1<sup>st</sup> February we enjoyed a behind-the-scenes visit to Shillingstone station, including the signal box and workshops where various items of rolling stock are undergoing restoration. It was also an opportunity to see the progress on the second Spetisbury running-in board, which should be ready and in position by the summer.

### Did you know...?

DORSET CENTRAL RAILWAY.										
WIMBORNE TO BLANDFORD										
Dep---	7.50*	9.50*	12.15*	2.45	6.45	8.53	Sun. *9.20*	3.26		
Stur. Mar.	8. 5	10. 5	12.30	3. 0	6.59	9. 8	„ 9.35	3.41		
Spettisbury.	8.15	10.13	12.38	3.10	7. 8	9.17	„ 9.45	3.51		
Blandford	8.23	10.21	12.46	3.18	7.15	9.25	„ 9.53	4. 0		
BLANDFORD TO WIMBORNE										
Dep---	6.45*	9. 0*	11.30*	12.55	5.15	8. 0	Sun. *6.50	2.35		
Spettisbury.	6.53	9. 8	11.38	1. 3	5.22	8. 8	„ 6.58	2.43		
Stur. Mar.	7. 3	9.18	11.48	1.13	5.31	8.18	„ 7. 8	2.53		
Wimborne	7.20	9.33	12. 3	1.28	5.46	8.33	„ 7.23	3. 8		

The station at Spetisbury was originally spelt with two Ts, as shown in this early railway timetable. This spelling lasted until at least the 1920s. The reference to Stur. Mar. refers to Sturminster Marshall. This station underwent a name change around 1863 when the Dorset Central Railway was

connected to the Somerset Central Railway, the new line between Wimborne and Burnham-on-Sea becoming known as the Somerset & Dorset Railway. As confusion might arise between the new station at Sturminster Newton and Sturminster Marshall, the latter was renamed Bailey Gate after the nearby turnpike road and toll gate.

### From the archive

Construction of the Dorset Central Railway began with a ceremony at Blandford St Mary on 13<sup>th</sup> November 1856. Frances, Lady Smith, used a ceremonial spade to cut the first sod of earth, which was then dropped into an ornamental wheelbarrow. Everyone then proceeded to the Blandford Assembly Rooms for a grand luncheon. The day's expenses amounted to £224 13s 2d (including £71 for wine) so clearly everyone enjoyed themselves a great deal!



the ceremonial wheelbarrow and spade, currently on display at Shillingstone station

The heaviest earthworks on the line occurred at Spetisbury, with the railway cut into the hillside high above the village and the River Stour. A quarry just below the station likely produced material to construct the embankments. The old Manor House near the church was demolished to make way for the new railway.

Work was completed by September 1860 and the opening date advertised as Monday 1st October. However, the *Southern Times* reported "*A little delay has been occasioned in the opening of the first section of this railway from Wimborne to Blandford, in consequence of the Government Inspector required a large sized turntable to be laid down at the Wimborne end of the line.*" At first the line terminated at a temporary station off Wards Drove at Blandford St Mary due to delays in bridging the River Stour into Blandford itself. The timber station was provided with a booking office, goods shed and engine shed, as well as a turntable. According to the *Sherborne Journal*, the station was "*unpretentious, and unsuitable for anything but the brief use which all Blandford residents must fervently wish*".

At noon on 31<sup>st</sup> October 1860 a train double-headed by two London & South Western Railway locomotives left the original Poole station at Lower Hamworthy. At Wimborne the train awaited the arrival of another train from London (Waterloo) conveying L&SWR officials before departing at 12.55, the first passenger train to traverse the Dorset Central Railway. The line opened to regular traffic the following day.

This photograph shows the very early days of Spetisbury (or Spettisbury...) station. The timber booking office and waiting room date from 1860, whilst the ladies' waiting room to the left was added when the platform was lengthened during 1888. The disc & crossbar signal features extensively in early photographs of the station.





Believe it or not, this is the same view today! Notice the edge of the 'up' platform in the foreground. This second platform was added around 1901. Enough land was originally purchased for double track in case traffic outgrew the single line railway. The Dorset Central Railway had built its bridges wide enough for two sets of rails, which later saved on costly rebuilding work.

[More information about the station's history can be found on our website.](#)



widening work in progress through the chalk circa 1899 as a train arrives from Blandford



construction of the 'up' platform station building nearing completion circa 1901



the station as rebuilt with a new platform, station building and signal box with various staff posing for the camera including the station master, a porter and four platelayers, which may include William Frederick Horlock or Alfred Joiner who both worked on the line from around 1881 to 1911

## *Dates for your diary*

**Sunday 12<sup>th</sup> July:** All aboard for our extra special **Railway Extravaganza!**

If you travelled on or remember the Somerset & Dorset railway, especially around Spetisbury, please come along and share your stories. Also check our website or Facebook page as we hope to feature something very special for S&D enthusiasts!



## *Railway Extravaganza!*

**Sunday 12<sup>th</sup> July 2026**

**Spetisbury Station Project**

(just off the A350 in Spetisbury village, Dorset)

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*Freshly-made Pimms, cold drinks, snacks*

*\* come and meet the Somerset & Dorset Railway Trust,  
Shillingstone Railway Project and North Dorset Trailway \*  
\* photographic displays \* railway books and DVDs for sale \**

*Entertainment by Blandford Ukulele Group*

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**ENTRY IS FREE** but donations help us maintain the station site. Cash preferred, or donate online at [www.justgiving.com/crowdfunding/spetisbury](http://www.justgiving.com/crowdfunding/spetisbury)

Please consider parking at Spetisbury Primary School (DT11 9DF), it is only a 10-minute walk along the Trailway to the station. Or why not cycle or take the bus? If wet, find us in the nearby Spetisbury Village Hall.

***Do you remember the Somerset & Dorset railway?***

Come along and share your memories, photographs and memorabilia.

**2026:** 70 years since the closure of Spetisbury station  
60 years since the closure of the Somerset & Dorset railway

Discover much more at [www.spetisburystationproject.wordpress.com](http://www.spetisburystationproject.wordpress.com)



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