



CHAIRMAN'S REPORT 2016

The Leeds-Morecambe Community Rail Partnership (LMCRP) and the Friends of Bentham Station (FOBS) have now spent a full year in their new home at Bentham station North Yorkshire County Council chose to continue their use of the station as a base for some of their minibus services and have completed a licence agreement with the CRP.

Thanks to Richard Wilson for continuing in the role of Treasurer and Lin Barrington for serving a further year as Secretary to the FOBS. Simon Clarke, Community Rail Development Officer for the Bentham Line, continues to be a regular visitor to Bentham Station and FOBS meetings, and is always keen to support and advise. The Carillon cleaning and maintenance team duo, Ian and Dale, continue to bring a weekly dose of tidiness and humour to the station, in supporting the work of FOBS.

Without a doubt, a further very big 'thank you' goes out once again from FOBS to Bloomin' Bentham for all their continued and ceaseless hard work, throughout the year, to make the station and its environs look 'blooming marvellous'! Well done to one and all; you can be truly proud of all you undertake in creating bright colourful displays for all in the town and Bentham Line passengers to enjoy.

The turn of the year brought news that the new Northern franchise had been awarded to Arriva Rail North Ltd. A new name but with both familiar and new faces with John O'Grady becoming Stakeholder Manager and Richard Isaac, recently taking up post as our Communities and Sustainability Manager and direct contact with Northern.

On the fourth Saturday in January FOBS again held a very successful coffee morning in Bentham Town Hall raising over £300 towards future projects. It remains a good opportunity to share details and photographs of all our work with many members of the local community.

A real challenge over the past two years has been to get the ever deteriorating 'Bentham Triangle' - a patch of road immediately outside the station entrance - brought up to a good standard. Following a positive intervention by County Councillor Ireton, North Yorkshire County Council undertook the necessary work in January but have stopped short of adopting the area.

The CCTV camera system is well into the second year of operation and has functioned successfully and reliably throughout. It proved to be a valuable resource in tracking down the thief of one of the antique chimney pot planters. Overall the system has had positive effects. There is far less 'hanging around' by local youths and their behaviour is calmer. Far more litter is now deposited in the bins provided on both platforms. All this helping to make the station a very pleasant place to visit and travel from.

During the winter months construction began on a model railway layout in the main room to assist in teaching visiting primary school groups. An application to the ACoRP small grants fund for £300 was successful and is being used to provide everyday classroom materials for our young visitors.

Bentham station took a giant leap forward this year into the 21st century, technologically speaking, with the introduction of 'Kath and Kitty' to the platforms. The ladies are the latest innovations in customer information screens. Warmly welcomed by passengers, they provide 'real time' train running information, complemented by a Twitter feed, BBC News and Northern advertising. On the whole they have performed well over their first nine months of operation. The occasionally weak 3G signal has disrupted the service information at times.

Following on from FOBS' work with Champion Bowland in 2015, the LMCRP has been working throughout 2016 with the Forest of Bowland (AONB) to create rail gateways to the forest at Giggleswick, Clapham, Bentham and Wennington. The initial 'alight here for' were put up on the stations, including Bentham, in February and the much larger Bowland information panels and leaflet dispensers in May. The scheme was formally launched at Clapham station in late May with FOBS members in attendance. FOBS has continued its membership of the Friends of Bowland in 2016.

FOBS continues to play a very positive role in the Bentham Carnival each May/June. The station was again the launch venue for the day's activities, with the Carnival Queen, (a drag queen this year), arriving by rail on the 11.20 from Wennington, a specially commissioned Royal Train. It also provided an opportunity this year to play a part in the nationwide 'Station to Station' community rail celebration of The Queen's 90th birthday. The FOBS pop-up café appeared on platform 1 and naturally, the station was beautifully bedecked with flags and bunting for the special occasion. The café raised over £100 towards funds with much better support this year, thanks in part to the warmer and sunnier carnival day.

Surplus funds from the first three years of the planter sponsorship scheme, involving members of We Are Bentham, were used to plant the tubs throughout 2016. A new sponsorship year will start in January 2017, when further funding will be sought. FOBS continues to be a member of We Are Bentham, supporting their activities including the annual duck race and Christmas lights in the town.

After preliminary discussions in Mytholmroyd and Bentham it was agreed, over the summer, to develop a 'Station to Station Across Yorkshire' project based on the twinning of the two stations and their respective adoption groups. This came to fruition on September 2nd with a party from FOBS, along with the Mayor of Bentham heading over to Mytholmroyd. We were warmly welcomed by the enthusiastic volunteers of Mytholmroyd. Following supportive speeches, gifts to mark the special occasion were exchanged.

Many thanks to Bob Sloan of FOBS who carved two superb slate plaques for the stations and to Sue Mitchel of Mytholmroyd who created a beautiful statuette of 'Hannah of the Dales' which was presented to FOBS on an engraved oak plinth.

The FOBS fifth anniversary celebrations took place on the 9th September along with the second part of the twinning formalities. Guests from Mytholmroyd Station Partnership, Northern, the Association of Community Rail Partnerships and Arriva, along with local Mayors and councillors, joined FOBS and CRP members for the celebrations.

The opportunity was also taken at the celebrations to formally unveil the 'A Day in the Life of Bentham' art panel on the footbridge. New visitors to Bentham, Daisy and Emily, the new-in-post education officers at Community Rail Lancashire were called upon to do the unveiling.

A 'first class' buffet lunch was provided by FOBS and was followed by slices of Margaret's 'to die for' lemon drizzle cake, which oozes loveliness, and locally made anniversary cupcakes decorated with a railway theme. The initial ceremonial cut of the cake being made by Geoff and Sue Mitchell from Mytholmroyd Station Partnership.

This year has seen the expansion of the use of the building. Bentham News make use of the main room on three occasions each month for the preparation of the local newsletter. The Extra Care Group have been meeting at the station this year too. This is in addition to CRP and FOBS meetings and in the summer months the committee meetings of the Lancaster and Skipton Rail User Group. All are warmly welcomed.

FOBS representatives were delighted to be invited by the CRP to join a Bentham Line table at this year's ACoRP Community Rail Awards, held at the Floral Hall in Southport at the end of September. Our representatives were delighted to collect two top awards for FOBS. We came first in the Best Community Engagement Event Category for the 'A Day in the Life of Bentham' photographic competition and project. FOBS were also awarded Gold Status in the 'It's Your Station' category for the extensive voluntary work at the station and for involving the community and rail bodies.

Earlier in the same week FOBS were invited by the Department for Transport to participate at the Community Rail Market Place event at the DfT's main offices at Great Minster House in London. The stall focussed on community involvement and proved to great opportunity to display the 'A Day in the Life of Bentham' exhibition alongside other events and details of the voluntary work at the station.

FOBS and their ideas have been able to inspire other groups and individuals again this year. Visitors to the station have included the Friends of Silverdale, St Anne's and Morecambe. I have also given presentations on specific projects and station adoption to the ACoRP annual conference in Norwich in March and at the first Northern Community Rail Conference in Manchester this month.

May I conclude by once again expressing my very sincere thanks to all the members of FOBS for their unstinting and generous donations of time and effort, to the tune of over 1,400 hours this year. I would also like to thank all the other people near and afar who have made individual or group contributions of funds, time and assistance to help make this a further very successful year for FOBS and Bentham station.

Bentham station is now widely respected as a constantly bright, cheerful and informative gateway to our community and is warmly welcomed and by locals, passengers, Northern and Network Rail and at the Department for Transport.

Gerald Townson
Chairman

30th November 2016.