

# Dent Station A Conservation Project

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Dedicated to Dr John Disney 1960-2018

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# Dent Station – A Conservation Project

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# Introduction

It is probably true to say that purchasing a railway station was not at the forefront of our minds in early 2020 as the Friends are essentially a user group and rail support organisation of some 3000 members. Indeed, the largest user group in the country. However, in the midst of the Covid pandemic, circumstances came together and that is exactly what happened. The opportunity presented itself to acquire the station whilst we had been looking for suitable projects as a result of various legacies. The possibility of owning the iconic Grade II building was quite compelling and an opportunity we simply couldn't miss.

From a personal perspective I knew little about the hospitality industry except perhaps for the places I'd stayed. More importantly, whilst having some basic knowledge of building I had not previously undertaken project management on a listed building restoration. I had spent the majority of my career working as a Chartered Loss Adjuster until retirement in early 2020. The station has been a learning experience, amongst other things negotiating the listed building process. It is probably true to say that I didn't know exactly how challenging it was going to be and, indeed, it has demanded an almost full-time commitment at times.

There have been many ups and downs along the way. However, when things are going well there can be no better place to be than working at England's highest mainline station, particularly on a fine day. On the whole, it has been a delight to oversee the project, during which time I have been supported by some fantastic tradesmen, mostly from along the valley, our dedicated housekeeper, Diane Wharton, and a small, dedicated group of volunteers notably including Kish Carey, Colin Luckett and Ken McClurg as well as



*Dent Station in the autumn sunshine October 2022*

others. We are also fortunate to have the support from some excellent colleagues including, Edward Album in legal and both Joanne Crompton and Damian Smith in finance who have all made essential contributions. Finally, we must not forget the generous benefactors whose legacies made this possible. A big thank you to all!

Much has already been written about the history of the station elsewhere and I do not propose to go into great detail on this; the purpose here is to recount some of the challenges and successes in the period since acquisition and perhaps a little of the background. I must apologise if parts of the story seem a little 'dry' but it is important that I attempt to record as much of the detail as possible for posterity.

## Some Perspective

Dent Station is a Grade II listed building of national significance, being the highest mainline station in England at 1150ft elevation and opened in 1877, shortly after the construction of the line. The building is a standard Midland Railway 'small station' and designed by company architect, John Holloway Sanders in a style often referred to as 'Derby gothic'. Stations were generally constructed in whatever local materials were available and, in this case, coarse sandstone external elevations.

The location is somewhat unique in an isolated position having a commanding view of the surrounding hills and Dentdale. It is some 680ft above and nearly 5 miles distant from the village of Dent, accessed by the steep and twisting Coal Road. The station location perplexes visitors to this day as they disembark the train expecting a tearoom or public house a short stroll away and often returning disappointed on the very next train back. In reality, the station should have been called Cowgill as indeed it nearly was, for it is far closer to that particular community.



*Great Coum and Middleton Fells as seen from the Station*

However, the naming as Dent is recognition of the fact that even up to the early 1900s Dent was a significant commercial centre for the area supporting several pubs, bank, various shops and all the necessary amenities. There was no easy access to the station and for most this would have involved a walk up the Coal Road, said to be unsurfaced until the early 1960s. There wasn't even a bus service until comparatively recent years, the twice a week Ribble bus terminating at Lea Yeat, below the station, on Wednesdays and Saturdays. There was no such thing as integrated transport in those days!

Train services were infrequent as most trains were express, rushing through at speed, or long heavy goods. After all, the S&C was designed as a fast route from London to Glasgow. In the rural economy most would not have reason or the means to travel far anyway. However, the main purpose of the station was as a commercial hub for the valley with goods such as coal coming to M.E. Haygarth & Son, the Dent coal merchant (1950s) in and livestock being shipped out. This was probably typical for most of the time.

The station itself supported a local community of rail workers including station master, signalmen, porters and permanent-way staff. Indeed, many residents of the nearby communities are related to former railway employees. Recollections suggest that the staff were always very busy attending to the various labour-intensive railway tasks which would perhaps be considered strange in this day and age but ticket sales would not have occupied much of their time! Passenger numbers at the station were never high and very few tickets sold according to the accounts of Rodney Hampson, the former station master in the 1950s.

## Decline of the Railway

Decline really occurred in the post war years after which the railways were not in a good shape. Motor transport had started to become more common and even the freight traffic, once a staple of Dent, would have seen a decrease. Passengers to most of the intermediate stations were few. Finally, the station ceased to be staffed in circa 1969 when the last station master departed, followed by closure to all passenger traffic in May 1970. By the late 1970s the line had seen a reduction of passenger services to two trains each way, these stopping at Settle and Appleby only with the majority of the intermediate stations closed - perhaps one way to ensure a decline in passengers!

The threat of closure lurked ever in the background, ultimately the condition of Ribbleshead viaduct being cited as being the main reason. These were not happy times and the railway was in a sorry state with basic levels of maintenance only. After all, why spend money on something destined for closure?

In the 1970s British Rail let the station and southbound waiting room to Barden Grammar School, Burnley as an outward-bound centre. The amenities would have been very basic to say the least and the buildings on both sides separated from the platforms by high post and mesh fences. Access to the southbound waiting room was by a rudimentary timber staircase and a path leading up to the road bridge. Little was done to maintain the buildings and by the early 1980s when vacated by the school, both station and waiting room were in a sorry and dilapidated state. The station building was damp and joinery in poor shape.

## The Station Becomes a Private Residence

However, another critical phase in the Dent Station story emerged in 1985 when British Rail eventually sold the building to Neil Ambrose, a railway development engineer, for conversion to a private residence. History would suggest that the sale was not without its problems as BR, having given up on the station, wanted to relinquish responsibility for the vehicle access bridge over Monkey Beck. Thankfully, this did not happen as the shrewd purchaser resisted. The future prospects for reopening the station could have otherwise been very different.

Significant works were done to restore the building to its former magnificence and with the additional installation of a mezzanine floor. The opportunity was taken to reinstate the ornate barge boards which had been stripped over the years and windows were reinstated with the original style small pane windows where these had been replaced with more utilitarian variety during railway ownership. It is assumed that the railway authorities had simply decided that it was futile to replace these with the architectural detail such was the harsh climate at what was a lesser used station. The resultant renovation undertaken by Mr Ambrose is much of what we see today.

During this period, the threat of closure loomed ever large and the campaign to save the line was in full swing. It was in the early 1980's that Colin Speakman, an enterprising officer at the Yorkshire

Dales National Park, negotiated with British Rail to charter a passenger train to serve all of the, by now, closed stations. This proved to be an immense success and it did mean that Dent was again back in passenger use from 1986 onwards. These DalesRail services were considered to be a vital factor in the ultimate reprieve of the line. The story is recounted in the excellent book by Stan Abbott 'To Kill a Railway'.



*The layout of the station as a residence (drawn John Carey)*

Move forward to 1989 and the line was eventually reprieved following a valiant campaign by the Friends. Indeed, the letter advising reprieve was sent to the FoSCL legal advisor, Edward Album, having been signed by a government minister, one Michael Portillo, later to establish a new career as a presenter of railway programmes. It should be added that Michael remains president of the Friends of the Settle Carlisle Line to this very day. The basic service of two trains each way very soon became six, all stopping at the intermediate stations including Dent.

At this time, many of the station buildings along the line were in poor condition having suffered from years of neglect. Indeed, it is difficult to imagine now, but the importance of retaining buildings and structures of historic significance was not always recognised. Some had been given a basic renovation by the railway authorities and, notably, three stations, Kirkby Stephen, Ribbleshead and Horton were handed over to the Settle and Carlisle Railway Trust on long leases following essential structural repairs. However, Dent was already outside the railway estate and in private ownership. On 18<sup>th</sup> October 1999, the station building received a Grade II listing as a building of national importance which is material to later in the story.

Of interest the listing states *'The Old Station at Dent Railway Station..... Railway station booking hall, waiting rooms (etc); now in private ownership and conversion as dwelling in progress at time of inspection (July 1994). Probably c1870, for Midland Railway Company; slightly altered. Coursed rock-faced sandstone with freestone dressings and steeply pitched Welsh slate roofs with pierced blue ridge tiles. Linear plan on north-south axis facing the track to the east, the main range a modified U-plan with a low wing attached at the south end. Free Tudor style'*.

## A New Era Dawns as a Holiday Let

In the around 2000, Mr Ambrose found it necessary to relocate to the Derby area for work and the house was put up for sale with a national agent at a then asking price of £195,000 (*Source: Daily Telegraph 2<sup>nd</sup> September 2000*). It was clearly on the market for some time, but the potential was spotted by Robin Hughes, a London based Chartered Surveyor whilst working in the area, and the property was duly purchased in November 2006 with the idea of establishing a holiday-let business. Robin then enthusiastically embarked upon the next phase of renovation, replacing the kitchen, upgrading heating and electrical installations amongst other things.

In the process, Robin managed to collect a prestigious Railway Heritage award for the restoration. Other awards followed. Further upgrades included the installation of a borehole, as the station had, up until then, obtained its water supply from the nearby Monkey Beck, inclined to dry up in summer and of sometimes dubious water quality with a peaty brown discolouration. It should be said that Dent Station, whilst it has electricity and phone, has to be self-contained for water, heating and sewerage, as are many houses in this remote locality. Finally, the building was re-roofed. The story is recounted in Robin's self-published book 'Ticket to Dent' which is an excellent read. This also includes Robin's restoration of the Snow Huts of which he still maintains ownership to this day.



*Dent Station showing the impressive location.*

During this period, the building enjoyed patronage from some well-known guests including the late Graham Taylor, the former England football manager, and was often featured on television programmes including those of Michael Portillo. Another programme is the often-repeated Channel 4 'Four in a Bed' where the property purported to be a bed and breakfast concern. The concept of the programme is that B&B owners battle it out for a week to win 'best value' establishment. The reviews were mixed but, as they say, 'no publicity is bad publicity' and booking enquiries increase even to this day whenever the programme is repeated. However, Robin found it necessary devote his attention to other property related projects and the station was again placed on the market in around 2018.

When a unique property such as Dent Station comes on the market it is sure to get a reasonable amount of attention from prospective buyers, many aspiring to the accolade of owning the highest main line station in England. Without doubt it would have been within the grasp of the more affluent purchasers from the south of the country as a second home. However, the building is, at heart, a railway station and does not easily lend itself to being a primary residence or even a second



home. The rooms are too big, ceilings 4m high and heating costs substantial. The usual course of action is to try and install a mezzanine 1<sup>st</sup> floor however that can be challenging and detrimental to the character of the building, plus which, the National Park seem to have an aversion to rooflights in listed buildings. Moreover, the maintenance costs of a building at this altitude and exposure might have been in the contemplation of many when they stopped to think about it. However, it just about works as a holiday let.

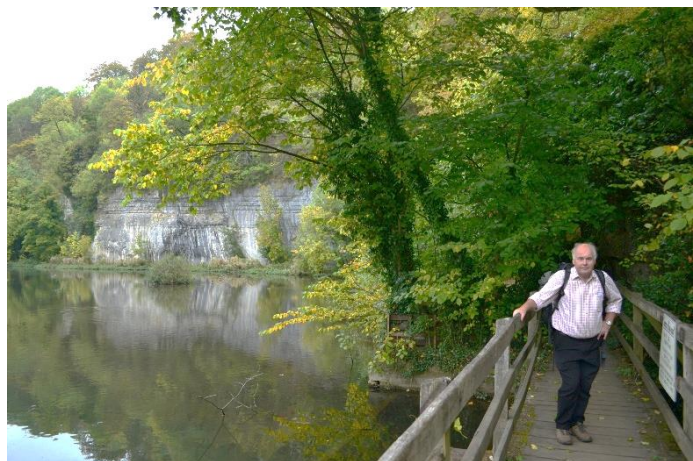
Despite the issues there were potential purchasers in the pipeline and were it not for the Covid pandemic the story may have been very different. The purchases did not proceed for whatever reason but, it is supposed, largely due to the uncertainties at the time. Quite simply, the Friends of the Settle Carlisle Line were offered the property at the right time. We also felt that the property was at risk of adverse ownership either as a second home or other purposes and would not have received the required future maintenance and conservation which it desperately needed.

## The John Disney Legacy

There is one other important part of the jigsaw. In October 2018, Dr John Disney, a much-valued FoSCL colleague and Settle-Carlisle supporter tragically passed away at a comparatively young age of 58 leaving a significant part of his estate to the Friends. John was a respected senior lecturer at Nottingham Trent University School of Business and a sought-after commentator on national transport issues including both bus and rail.

Notable occasions included a live appearance on BBC Breakfast waiting at a bus stop just outside Kirkby Stephen, which probably hadn't seen a regular bus service in some years, and another for BBC Countryfile where we commandeered a bus and travelled through the Dales complete with a film crew, John articulating the problems of rural transport. John was always at ease with the media.

Had it not been for his untimely death John had been due to present evidence at the House of Commons Transport Select Committee on the following Monday. Instead, the committee chair, Lillian Greenwood MP paid a fitting tribute.



*John Disney in Millers Dale in the Peak District, a place he loved almost as much as the Yorkshire Dales! Photo taken October 2018*

John was also an advisor to FoSCL on strategic transport matters connected with the line, as well as sharing the role as FoSCL guided walks coordinator and regularly making an early morning trip north from his house on the outskirts of Derby. This and other generous legacies FoSCL had

received created a healthy bank balance and the need to look for worthwhile projects connected with the line.

Thus, the acquisition of Dent Station presented an excellent use of the funds which would be applauded by the donors and the majority of our membership. It is perhaps coincidental that Dent was a special place for John and somewhere he often visited. Hopefully, by using the income gained from letting we could ensure the conservation of the building for posterity. Naturally, we realised that it would also bring certain challenges.

The Friends are not typical property owners and, apart from leases on two signal boxes, two shops and a workshop, have no other property interests. We had, in the past provided considerable financial support to The Settle Carlisle Railway Trust towards the purchase and restoration of Ribbleshead Station Master's House as well as other projects but never undertaken such a project ourselves.

Incidentally, on a Dent theme, the Friends had earlier provided financial support to the fledgling Western Dales Community Bus in their efforts to maintain a bus service from Dent Station to Kendal. That is still going strong to this day making Dent Station the highest bus rail interchange in the country. The service was in fact inaugurated in the house car park in 2013 officiated by the local MP, Tim Farron, albeit this was a good year after the service had started. Also, we subsequently lobbied the council for the installation of a bus stop sign and this was eventually installed in 2019. Thus, we already had an attachment of sorts to the station.



*Westmorland and Lonsdale MP Tim Farron inaugurates the Western Dales Bus with WDB Chair, Jock Cairns, and a crowd of onlookers on 8 June 2013*

We therefore embarked upon purchase of the station under the expert guidance of our legal advisor, Edward Album, who undertook all of the legal work himself at no cost to the association. Indeed, Edward's contribution to the process should not be understated. Surveys were undertaken from which it was clear that ownership was not for the faint hearted and the reports were full of words of caution. Having completed due diligence a price was agreed the sale went through in the knowledge that we were going to face some significant challenges going forward and a catch-up on maintenance items.

## The Friends Take Ownership

Thus, on 4<sup>th</sup> September 2020 in the midst of the Covid pandemic the Friends became the proud owners of Dent Station and the hand-over was marked with a ceremony at the Station where Robin Hughes handed over the keys. Robin was satisfied that we were a safe pair of hands to carry on the work of conservation, indeed a continual and ongoing process.

The reality quickly sunk home that we were actually going to have to do this, and it proved to be a steep learning curve. There were a number of immediate issues of which we were aware, and we began to plan exactly how we might do it. During this time, we also had to become acquainted with the more detailed operational aspects of the house and its services including heating, electrical and water systems.



*Paul Brown (FoSCL chair), Robin Hughes and Paul Kampen on handover day*

Any intention to let the house to gain income was quickly thwarted by the second period of Covid lock down enforced by the government. However, we were able to use the time to carry out essential work to upgrade the electrical and fire alarm installations for which we were fortunate to be guided in the direction of Roger Keighley, a local electrician. Roger quickly assessed what was needed to bring the systems up to scratch. The distribution board was showing its age and replaced with a modern safer version. All fittings were replaced, and the installation certified as being fit for purpose at the end of October 2020.

It was also necessary to prioritise redecoration of the booking hall which, at that time had wallpaper peeling off the walls due to historic damp. This work of wallpaper stripping the 4m (13ft) high walls was undertaken by volunteers, Marion and John Armstrong, who stepped in and performed sterling work. For the redecoration we were introduced to Steven Alderson, a first-rate decorator from nearby Sedbergh and someone upon whom we would later come to rely. Steven got cracking sanding the plaster down and emulsion painting walls together with the 4m high ceiling. The wallpaper applied earlier was never a good idea!

Positioned in the centre of the ceiling was a chandelier, no doubt a piece of architectural salvage, and a fine statement piece although not original to the station and certainly not the usual fitting for a booking hall of a minor station! This received a good clean with new LED bulbs and it made all the difference. The original booking hall bench seating received a repaint in Midland colours by volunteer Cliff Johnson. At the end of all of this the Booking Hall looked in fine shape.

We carried out a detailed inventory of what we had and items we needed. Critical to continuing as holiday accommodation we also had to procure the necessary linen and other items to standard



which guests would expect. Fortunately, my long-suffering wife, Kish Carey, undertook to oversee this aspect. In the event, we were able to locate nearly everything we needed from Out of Eden, a hotel supplier based in nearby Kirkby Stephen.



*The hard work comes together! (December 2020)*



We are also indebted to Rachel Griffiths who, with considerable experience on the Kirkby Stephen and Ribbleshead holiday lets, was able to guide us through the letting process and assist with setting up suitable systems and advertising. Richard Morris worked on the website which Robin Hughes kindly donated across to us.



*Dent Station in typical winter conditions December 2020*

By December 2020, the house was in satisfactory condition for letting and we were able to welcome our first guests over the Christmas week following a temporary relaxation in the Covid restrictions. However, as many will recall this was short-lived with a dramatic rise in Covid cases and the government swiftly imposed another period of lockdown immediately following Christmas.

## Covid Restrictions Continue

The beginning of 2021 was a strange time. Covid restrictions were again imposed and, in contrast to the frenetic activity before Christmas, we were faced with the prospect of limited access to the house, hoping that everything was OK and that the heating was working. Certain regions had clamped down harder on the movement of individuals except for essential duties. It is difficult to remember with the passage of time exactly how difficult it was. Travel by train was difficult with the implementation of a key worker timetable which made no sense at all for anybody actually wanting to get to work. The earliest arrival time in Leeds was 1034 and Carlisle 1030. Needless to say, many of these trains ran with very few passengers.

Eventually, we were able to visit the house in the context of 'essential work' and fortunately everything was OK, well for a moment anyway. Thankfully, restrictions were lifted for holiday accommodation in late spring, and we were back open again. In fact, we had only managed 1 weeks' letting at that point! We were naturally anxious being newcomers to the holiday business but sometimes



*The southbound waiting room following refurbishment.*

that is a good thing. Complacency would have given rise to guest issues and fortunately we had few.

Meanwhile, across the track, in March 2021, railway contractors were undertaking an overdue external refurbishment of the southbound waiting room. This is the only original building still in railway ownership dating from circa 1877. The building was scaffolded and refurbishment carried out to the blue slate roof, lime pointing, new barge boards and window joinery together with a fresh coat of paint. We watched on with interest.

Another point worthy of note was that, in February, further hard work undertaken by Edward Album paid off and we were accepted as an organisation of national importance which meant that we could be exempt from inheritance tax. This placed us along with the Yorkshire Dales National Park and other such bodies. Naturally, we were delighted.

## A Film Company Arrives

A memorable event in March 2021 was an approach from a film company wishing to use the station as a set in a feature film portraying the life and times of Emily Bronte. Perhaps not widely known is that the Bronte sisters had close connections with the area also attending a school for the daughters of church ministers in nearby Cowan Bridge. Much to our surprise they were adamant that they wished to use the station as the location for Branwell Bronte's 'cottage'. Incidentally, Branwell was, for a short while, clerk at Luddenfoot Station on the Calder Valley line, a notably low-lying location in a valley in complete contrast to Dent! We pointed out that the building could not really be described as a 'cottage' with its 4m (13ft) high ceilings but they remained undeterred. Throughout the discussions they continued to refer to 'Branwell's Cottage'. Such is the artistic license of the filmmaker.

Various negotiations ensued and they would need the house for a two-week period from 8<sup>th</sup> – 18<sup>th</sup> May 2021 and need to do a make-over. We were naturally cautious as regards any proposed cosmetic changes. Whilst this could be accommodated, we could not risk an overrun or the house not being returned to its former glory in time for incoming guests. However, our concerns were short-lived as the film company decided it was all too much trouble and they would instead utilise the house as a 'dressing room' whilst they filmed on the high fells above the railway line.

One wonders what actually happened, but it is most likely the recreation of Branwell's residence was, in the end, constructed in a film studio. The station house would also be somewhere to park the many vehicles needed for the crews and equipment. The saga passed uneventfully and no doubt a few local farmers benefited from some extra cash in renting out their dilapidated barns.

## A Near Catastrophe

Whilst we had a reasonable idea of the work we would need to undertake to maintain the building it is often the case that events can suddenly take a different turn when least expected and best laid

plans fall to pieces. It is certainly true in the case of the Station. In the course of March 2021, poor weather caused the collapse of the barge board to the west gable. This in turn revealed a serious defect in that the purlins immediately behind which were in an advanced state of decay due to exposure to the prevailing weather. The purlins in turn support the overhang of the roof.

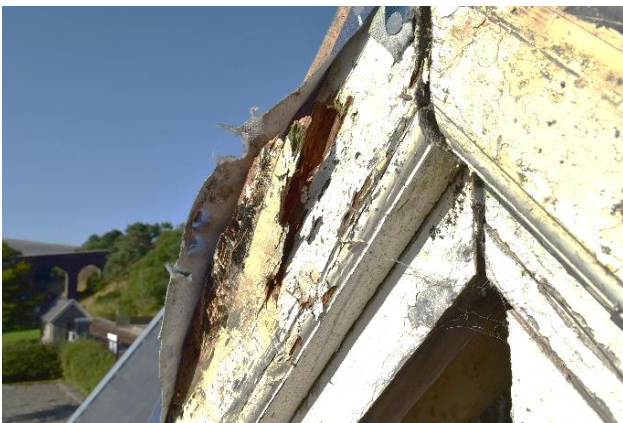
We carried out a detailed check of the roof timbers gaining access to the roof space which had been difficult up to that point. It was quite unusual to have a loft access hatch 4m (13ft) up in the ceiling (within the Porter's Room) when in most normal houses it would be around half of that. However, once into the roof-space we found clear access across a part boarded floor and even an electric light. A narrow crawl way through the structural wall led to the cavernous roof space behind the west gable.



*A decayed purlin on the west gable*

Much to our surprise it was actually quite tidy and even equipped with power sockets. Thankfully, there were no other serious defects in the roof.

It was around this time that we were joined by Colin Lockett, a retired solicitor from nearby Ais Gill. Colin has proved to be an immense help in acting as a sounding board and assisting with the decision making. It is often said that two heads are better than one and certainly true in this case.



*Showing the state of the gable barge boards (2021)*

Help was sought from a locally based consulting engineer and the advice was to introduce new purlins which would be bolted on to the existing. This would be a tricky operation necessitating removal and replacement of the west gable roof. This may seem illogical, but the nature of which slates are lapped over each other inevitably means disturbance of a far greater area than for the actual work itself, and, in this case, right up to the lead valley. In this way the integrity of the roof covering can be retained.

In addition, the west gable window was suffering from decay, a fact which we had known, and replacement was within our contemplation as a priority. We envisaged that replacement would be with a suitable heritage style window incorporating double glazing. The work could be ideally undertaken at the same time as the purlin replacement. Before we could get to the stage of repairing the roof the formality of a listed building application had to be undertaken which we submitted on 20<sup>th</sup> May 2021. For the uninitiated this is a daunting process of form filling and a steep learning curve. It would be frustrating for professionals let alone volunteers. The planning department at the Yorkshire Dales National Park are not the easiest to deal with. Unfortunately, we encountered our first hurdle in that we were advised to remove the application for the window (due to a dislike of double glazing) to allow the roof to be considered. We reluctantly did so, the saga of which will reappear later at some length. The roof was our priority.

As anybody familiar with planning will know the process takes a minimum period of 8 weeks from receipt of the formal application and, whilst not guaranteed, it is unlikely to be granted in any less than this. We received comments back from the listed building officer as to the re-use of existing materials. However, for our part we contended that little remained of the original roof as most had been replaced since 1985 onwards. Nevertheless, we would propose to salvage where viable.

We were also asked to provide a bat survey which we assume is standard for many buildings in the National Park. However, given the altitude and exposure we argued that the possibility of bats being present was remote and, in event of any delay in carrying out the work, the resultant collapse would potentially destroy their home anyway! Fortunately, common sense prevailed and we were spared the not inconsiderable expense and delay. Consent was duly provided on 1<sup>st</sup> June 2021. We had taken the precaution of identifying an 8-week period in September and October to carry out the work. Fortunately, it all came together whether by accident or design.

Dentdale has some first-rate tradesmen and none more so than Julian Wilkinson a local builder together with Philip and Edwin Middleton, joiners, and all expert in dealing with historic buildings. Under their expert guidance we formulated a plan together with budget costs and the works started in early September 2021. The west gable was scaffolded and the slate roof covering carefully removed by Julian and his team of three including Rob and Sam, with materials stacked to one side for re-use. Julian is an unassuming man of considerable building skill and was unfazed by the whole operation. It had all been done before.

Timbers were removed and reconstructed with more resilient hardwood by Phillip and Edwin. The decayed ornate barge boards were removed and, for the sake of expediency, the replacement assigned to Wonder of Wood, a joinery workshop based at Stainforth, alongside the line. Amazingly these were machined and new barge boards returned to site in a matter of days, the chosen timber being Accoya, a resilient softwood. These were heavy pieces of timber and it took three of us to lift to the roof. Incidentally, the removed barge boards were dated 1987 confirming our suspicion that these were more recent additions and therefore of no historic merit.





*New purlins (showing the bolted connection) and barge board in place (September 2021)*

The work carried by all parties was outstanding and the reinstatement progressed without problem. We were fortunate that it didn't rain for 4 weeks but each evening the roof was protected. It was only on the 5<sup>th</sup> week that the heavens opened by which time we were on the final leg of the re-roofing. One further benefit of local tradesmen is that they understand the weather conditions which can vary considerably from dale to dale. The inside of the building remained dry throughout. On the warmer evenings the existence of the scaffolding presented an outstanding vantage point to just sit and look down the valley after the workmen had gone home.



*Reinstating the slating (September 2021)*

At the same time, we decided to take the opportunity to upgrade the oil-fired heating system which had been temperamental to say the least. On a number of occasions, we were caused to attend the

house to deal with problems and it was clear that we needed something more reliable. The existing oil-fired boiler had been installed in the coal store which was thick with coal dust and not an ideal situation. The coal was cleared out by yours truly and relocated to an outside bunker. This would permit better layout of the heating plant in a clean environment.

We approached Gary Sedgwick a plumbing and heating engineer based in Cowgill at the bottom of the hill to undertake the work of replacing the installation together with fuel tank and controls. Incidentally, Gary comes from a well-known railway family with a strong connection to line but, more particularly, is the go-to plumber in the valley and only 2 minutes drive from the station. Gary's father, Roy Sedgwick was one of the last signalmen and still resides in Cowgill.



*Dent Station (September 2021)*

Gary and his team comprising brother Mark and respective sons Ross and Ben commenced work on 16<sup>th</sup> September and continued into October at the end of which the new metal fuel tank was craned in with a week or so to spare in which to commission the system. Thus, we have a more functional system fit for the next few years. We have future-proofed with HIVE remote control which we will be able to commission once we have an improved internet and wi-fi connection but, for now, all settings have to be carried out on site.



*The old fuel tank is removed and the new tank placed into the cattle dock (October 2021)*

Sadly, we concluded that it was no longer possible to incorporate the Rayburn (a feature in the 'Four in a Bed' programme) within a modern efficient heating system and this was disconnected. It is not possible to operate without water and so it stands as an ornament until we decide what to do.

Fortunately, all of the works were completed by the time of arrival of our next guests at the end of October 2021 and we breathed a sigh of relief, well, for that moment anyway.



## Gardening, Botany and Other Matters

The house is located in approximately 1/3 acre, some of which is gravel car park and the remainder, best described as 'wild', dropping steeply down to Monkey Beck. It comes alive with wildflowers in early summer including hundreds of Orchids which have been allowed to establish probably due to the lack of grazing.



*Common spotted Orchids in abundance (June)*

As custodians of such an important site it was incumbent upon us to take stock of the flora and, for this, we are much indebted to our volunteer and Vice President, Pete Shaw, who is an expert in botanical matters. Pete was able to undertake a detailed survey from which we were able to compile a list of species which can probably best described as characteristic of an upland ungrazed pasture:

<i>Betony</i>	<i>Eyebright</i>	<i>Purple toadflax</i>
<i>Birds Foot Trefoil</i>	<i>Forget me Not</i>	<i>Ragwort</i>
<i>Burnet Saxifrage</i>	<i>Germander Speedwell</i>	<i>Raspberry</i>
<i>Buttercup</i>	<i>Hawkweed</i>	<i>Redshanks</i>
<i>Clover</i>	<i>Knapweed</i>	<i>Saint John's Wort</i>
<i>Coltsfoot</i>	<i>Lady's Bedstraw</i>	<i>Self Heal</i>
<i>Common Spotted Orchid</i>	<i>Lady's Mantle</i>	<i>Thistle</i>
<i>Crosswort</i>	<i>Plantain</i>	<i>Vetch</i>
<i>Daisy</i>	<i>Primrose</i>	<i>Willow Herb</i>
<i>Dock</i>	<i>Purging Flax</i>	<i>Yarrow</i>

Visitors are often treated to sightings of local wildlife including deer. For a while we even had a family of stoats which proved to be an added bonus for some of our guests, no doubt attracted by the many rabbits. Strangely, the rabbits are now gone and the stoats moved on, presumably to find a new food source. The abundant field voles seemed to get accustomed to our presence and, on one occasion, a mother removed her young one by one from a nest in the foundations to the nearby drystone wall whilst we watched on. The process took the best part of an hour.



*A resident field vole*

It was in around September 2021 that Ken McClurg, a local resident from Dent appeared on the scene and asked if he could help out with the grounds. Not about to turn away such a kind offer we readily accepted. To his credit Ken got straight to work with hedge cutter and a strimmer and the overgrown wilderness was quickly sorted. This may seem harsh but in fact the cutting back of the higher grasses and vegetation has allowed the wildflowers to thrive and the strategy proved to be correct. Ken has continued to look after the grounds as well as anything else required such as fence painting and is a valuable member of the team. It should be added that, as with many local residents, Ken has a strong family connection to the line and his father was a signalman and he recounts stories of the signalman doubling up as the local hairdresser.

Meanwhile, we have a few planters and tubs which are the domain of Colin Lockett and Josie Perriman. Josie has since taken a well-earned retirement. Colin introduced a half barrel to the patio and these smaller planted areas definitely add a feature to some otherwise bland areas.



*Colin Lockett tending one of the planters (July 2022)*



*Gardening team Josie Perriman, Peter and Cynthia Hardiman with newly installed model train planter (March 2022)*

2021 did have some amusing moments such as the BT telephone engineer who had been booked to install basic broadband, something which the house had never had. It was becoming an issue for some of our guests who strangely required access to the outside world. Having travelled to Dent Station to unlock the door I received a call from the engineer who was in Dent village asking where the station was. I directed the gentleman to the end of the valley (nearly 5 miles from the village) and the turning for the Coal Road.

A few minutes later another call to say there was still no sign of the station. Well, it was a misty day. I had to advise that the railway line was in fact directly above him! Perhaps not quite believing what he'd been told this prompted yet another call to say, 'still no sign of a station'. However, a few hundred yards up the hill and all was revealed. Dent Station does in fact now have broadband of the lowest speed possibly imaginable being at the end of the copper wire from the exchange in Sedbergh, some 10 miles away. The BT engineer questioned whether it was worth the bother but we think so! In time we will install fibre but, at the moment, this is not a priority.



On one occasion earlier in 2021 we received a call from a guest, and probably one of only a few occasions this has happened. The water had gone off. Obviously, this sounded quite alarming and so, as a precaution, we notified the water engineer who agreed to make an emergency visit and I headed off on the 50-mile trip up to Dent to oversee matters. Having got there it became apparent that it was not so much a problem with the water, but the power was off on which the water system depends.

It did highlight that our pump also served the separate Snow Hut cottages some distance down the track (a fact of which we were previously unaware) and there were quite possibly some unamused folks who had been mid-shower at the time. The cause of the problem? Well, in fact, our boiler control circuit had blown which had tripped the electrics. Things are not always what they seem. Thankfully, all was promptly sorted but this was a catalyst to the ultimate decision to replace the heating installation as mentioned earlier.



*The Chirk log train passing*

Throughout the summer the Staycation Express was passing, this year a former Intercity 125 set running between Skipton to Carlisle and operated by Rail Charter Services as an open access experiment. The service was certainly well received with superior 1<sup>st</sup> class seating and an entirely different experience in comfort and views from the normal 158s used on the line.

As with most remote properties we found ourselves inevitably having to deal with the cess pit once we had located exactly where it was in the undergrowth! Experience had shown that there is always a local contractor available for most things and indeed local recommendation pointed us in the direction of David Labbate based in Garsdale, just over the hill, and an arrangement was made. Expecting a tanker lorry to emerge down the Coal Road no one was more surprised than myself when this turned out to be a farm tractor and slurry tank appearing through the mist. Within minutes the job was done and one less thing to worry about.

As a business we do not benefit from the normal council domestic waste collection which many of us take for granted. It would be necessary to arrange through one of the commercial operators assuming that they would even be prepared to come to the station. However, following enquiry, the costs involved would be considerable and the collection would not even be from the door. We have therefore necessarily adopted the system from the previous owner whereby recycling is carefully separated out and we arrange our own disposal to the waste transfer station.

Another long running issue had involved the station clock which had been indicating the wrong time for at least a year after we acquired the house and probably much longer before that. Adjustment was not as straightforward as simply moving the hands! This was a Potts of Leeds

mains-powered clock equipped with a Smiths of Derby 'Auto Restart' control unit and, we believe, had once been restored by volunteers on the line. It is suspected that somebody took an active interest in all of the station clocks along the line and if only we could have found them!

Without immediate access to the expert it took some time to understand the unit but it is best described as an 'on/off switch' which could be programmed to restart the clock at the correct time simply by switching the AC power on and off. Having overcome the technicalities, the clock is performing satisfactorily and indeed recognises when there has been a power cut (a frequent occurrence) and adjusts itself. No longer will it give the conductors of passing trains a fright or indeed intending passengers for that matter!

## The Saga of the West Window

After the success of the 2021 period of works there was little opportunity to sit back and relax. The thorny issue of the listed building application for replacing the west window remained. It was around November that I began to give some serious thought to how we might progress and sought guidance from heritage architects who had kindly offered their assistance. We also discussed at length with our manufacturing joiners at Stainforth. This was indeed to be a substantial window unit approximately 2m (6' 6"ft) wide x 2.3m (7' 6") high with an arched head and far larger than the average domestic window.

It should be said at this point that the Friends uphold the principle of maintaining the heritage of the line. Indeed, we wished to work closely with the listed building officer and do the right thing. However, what followed was immensely frustrating and stretched resources of mere volunteers to breaking point.



*Showing the serious decay on the west window*

Various proposals were considered from 'very basic' to something replicating the original heritage window in some 119 panes but, without doubt, we had decided that all options would need to be double glazed such is the nature of the weather at this location. The existing dilapidated window was in fact double glazed, of comparatively recent origin and of no particular architectural merit. The likelihood was that the planning department were unaware of this more recent change.

Any original windows on the west elevation had long since vanished to be replaced by more utilitarian windows, however, it was recognised from photographic records that the 1985 restoration had most likely sought to recreate these only to later fail with the adverse climate. This was considered largely due to the number putty joints, glazing bars and small glazed units. In

contrast, a double-glazed unit would be far more robust and also provide necessary thermal insulation.

It is somehow perplexing that we could have a conflict between the requirements to conserve energy and the requirements of the listed buildings officer in this day and age when it is recognised by most sane folks that we are in the middle of a climate emergency. However, that is exactly the position in which we found ourselves. There is no reason to suppose that we would have fared any better than the rail authorities and successive owners had we gone down the route of a single glazed multi-pane window. All before had failed with this approach.

A decision was therefore made to resubmit the application for pre-planning in the simplest form i.e., with 6 double glazed units in a large frame consistent with the Midland Railway format (but without the sashes incorporating small panes) which we did on 14<sup>th</sup> December 2021 fully expecting to be 'negotiated' upwards. We also took the precaution of identifying two work periods, one of 6 weeks in June and another of 4 weeks in September 2022 not knowing precisely when or if we might get approval, but also to enable other works to be undertaken. Some element of forward planning is essential, as once a holiday booking is taken it would be exceedingly difficult, if not impossible, to cancel in order to do work. However, we could always take bookings at short notice if the period was not ultimately required. This is the nature of holiday-lets.


Perhaps not surprisingly, the listed building approval pre-application was rejected mostly due to the double-glazing aspect and lack of small panes as per the original. The objection to normal double glazing would appear to be largely due to the shadow cast by the edge spacer and reflections caused by the glass. As the window was some considerable distance from the public road we felt that this was hardly likely to be an issue. Apparently, slim-line double glazing can be tolerated as a heritage solution in some instances but also is very expensive and, we concluded, unsuited to multi pane windows of this type and location.

The objection to double glazing was all the more perplexing as we observed that Hawes Station, a building more or less identical to Dent and a typical Midland 'small' station design and similarly listed, had a very crude example of double glazing to the very same window. Even more bizarrely, this particular building was actually owned by the National Park themselves as part of the Dales Countryside Museum and highly visible from their public car park. Needless to say, we did not hesitate to highlight the irony of this fact!

Further discussion ensued with a few twists and turns, following which, we gained support from Nick Cotton, the local county councillor, for the inclusion of double glazing and the National Park were urged to make some compromise. We resubmitted as a formal application on 29<sup>th</sup> March 2022, this time with a design comprising small panes laid over the top of double glazing as recommended by our joiner and waited for the statutory 8-week period. The omens were favourable and indeed it was indicated that we would succeed. However, little did we know but there had been a change of senior planning officer in the interim and, much to our surprise, we were advised of a potential refusal some 10 weeks later.



As a last resort, in June 2022, we sought a meeting with the National Park planning officer in order to attempt find a resolution, pointing out that the building was now at some considerable risk should failure and collapse occur. As a members' organisation we were of limited resources and unable to sustain such potential losses. In the event, we were able to agree that if we resubmitted as a simple double-glazed window this would receive favourable consideration. Ironically, this is more or less what we first submitted in December 2021! Such is life.



Mr J Carey,  
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25 Croft Way  
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Ilkley  
LS29 6LT

**LISTED BUILDING CONSENT**  
Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990

Application No.	S/01164F/L/B
Date Received	30 March 2022
Applicant	Friends of the Settle Carlisle Line
Proposal	Listed building consent for replacement of existing West window
Location	The Old Station, Cowgill, Dent, Sedbergh, LA10 5RF
Decision date	04 August 2022

The Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority has considered this application under the Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 (as amended) and Grants Listed Building Consent for the development described above.


Consent is granted subject to the following Condition(s) and Reason(s):

**Conditions**

- The works to which this consent relates shall be begun not later than the expiration of three years beginning with the date of this notice.

Reason: To comply with the requirements of Section 18 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 (as amended by section 51 (4) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004)

- The works shall be carried out in accordance with the details indicated in the following drawing/documents:
  - Location Plan;
  - Ground Floor Plan, Drawing no. 001;
  - West Elevation, Drawing no. 002;
  - South Elevation, Drawing 003;
  - East Elevation, Drawing no. 004;
  - North Elevation, Drawing no. 005, all received 30th March 2022.



- Heritage Statement - Design and Access Statement;  
- WW0014 Dent Station: Existing Window Photograph;  
- WW007 Dent Station: Existing Window Photograph;  
- WW009 Dent Station: West Window Elevation as Proposed;  
Proposed);  
- WW0054 Dent Station: West Window Millon and Transom Sectional Detail (as Proposed);  
14th July 2022.

Reason: To define the plans/details to which this consent relates.

Reason(s) to Applicant:  
Consent applies only to that required by the Town and Country Planning Act and does not require any permission or approval under any other enactment, bylaw, regulation or under any other Act.

It is drawn to the attached notes explaining your rights of appeal regarding this consent.

Which this notice refers MAY contain the requirement to comply with certain conditions of the development. You are hereby advised that non-compliance with any condition of this consent invalidates the development and you are liable to prosecution. If you are in any doubt as to the requirements of any condition you are strongly advised to contact the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority Management team (01569 65245) for clarification BEFORE the development commences.

Any condition(s) (discharge of conditions(s)) is now treated as a separate application. Please contact the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority Management team should you require further clarification.

[www.yorkshire-dales.gov.uk/development-control](http://www.yorkshire-dales.gov.uk/development-control)

has worked with the applicant in a positive and proactive manner in accordance with local and national policy.

### Listed Building Consent finally arrives 4<sup>th</sup> August 2022

The amended proposal resubmitted on 13<sup>th</sup> July was for a functional window of little heritage merit but did, at least, follow the basic Midland style of window. Importantly, it would more than adequately serve the purpose with double glazing and offering an excellent view down the valley. After all of that, listed building consent was duly received on 4<sup>th</sup> August 2022, hardly a triumph but more of a relief. We still had to actually manufacture and install the window.

## External Redecoration and the Platform Windows

2022 proved to be an eventful year in which we made some significant progress, meanwhile continuing our learning process. Running the property was becoming more routine and thankfully due to our dedicated housekeeper, Diane, we managed to maintain the house in a fit state to receive guests throughout whilst paused bookings occasionally to undertake work. In fact, we now had an excellent team.

In May 2022 South Lakeland District Council finally caught up with us and carried out testing of the private water supply as required by statute. It should be said that the water supply originates from a borehole some 18m (60 ft) below and located just outside the tractor shed. It is then treated and filtered, the process needing some fine-tuning, but we were improving all the time. Fortunately, on

this occasion the tests came back well within acceptable parameters and at least we weren't poisoning our guests!

With the listed building application for the west window bubbling away during the course of 2022 it was necessary to do what we could on the remaining works. Priority was given to the undertaking and securing the external fabric of the building working downwards from roof level. We decided it would be sensible to undertake the external painting, at the same time identifying and rectifying any areas of decay, working our way from top to bottom. Simultaneously, we would carry out restoration of three



*Steven Alderson painting the bargeboard at high level as the mid-afternoon northbound passes on 11<sup>th</sup> July 2022*

platform facing windows which were in poor condition and we feared unlikely to last another season. The latter would be 'suck and see' as it would depend on the extent of decay found.

Research with the Settle Carlisle Design Guide had identified that the Midland 'red' colour was in fact a Crown Royal Maroon shade. This prompted a visit to the Crown decorating centre in Bradford which revealed that they also mixed heritage paint for the Worth Valley Railway. So, we'd definitely gone to the right place. This colour was well known to them, as was the lighter colour used on the station, Ivory Cream. The paint was purchased and, with the car loaded, with I set off some 50 miles north to deliver to Dent Station.

We engaged our friends Steven Alderson (decorator) and Philip and Edwin Middleton (joiners) having put them on notice earlier in the year and from 13<sup>th</sup> June both commenced work. It really couldn't have worked out better. Steven started preparing and redecorating the barge boards and soffit at high level whilst Philip was able to cut out any defective timber and splice in new sound material.

This process continued over a few weeks with the platform elevation being fully scaffolded as the only means we could gain safe access. The gable peaks are over 8m high and it is pretty scary working at that height. The scaffolding also creating some interesting opportunities for trainspotting from a new vantage point! In other areas Steven used a mobile platform and ladders. It should be said that Steven is a perfectionist and his attention to detail at the preparation stage is commendable.

Meanwhile Philip and Edwin commenced work on restoring the 3 platform windows all of which are single glazed. This was no mean undertaking as each large window has 119 panes of glass. It is

worth mentioning that we did not contemplate replacement of the windows as there were possibly elements of original window still there and we did not wish to involve the listed building process which replacement would have surely involved. A more limited repair could be undertaken without seeking consent and was probably the more sensible option anyway and within our heritage ethos. These would be retained as single glazed and, being on the platform elevation, were not as exposed to the harsh elements.

Philip (son) and Edwin Middleton (father) really are a delight to work with, usually accompanied by Reg, the black Labrador who was on 'work experience'. The Middletons are a long-established Dent family and exceptional tradesmen confining their work largely to Dent customers. They won't mind me saying but neither has any ambition to travel far out of Dent except for the occasional holiday. After all, why would you? Also, it is doubtful that either had used Dent station for outward travel in recent times and they were surprised to see quite how many trains were running!



*Philip Middleton carefully re-assembling the decayed elements of the windows and the completed work before decoration (June 2022)*

The glass was individually removed from the windows and stacked without breakage. Rotten glazing bars and window frame were carefully cut out and new mouldings manufactured to match the original in the workshop and, incredibly, spliced in. Philip admitted that this is the most intricate work he'd done but the results were truly amazing. Finally, the windows were reglazed with the same glass and later painted by Steven.

We were never quite sure as to the vintage of the windows at the start but in the process of dismantling and it appeared that there were indeed likely to be elements of original window



timber, but it was likely that the more recent timber used in the splices had failed. Quite simply, the material used had been inferior. We continually learn more about the building as we do the work!

The front doors to the entrance porch were in a poor state with areas of decay. It had been originally thought that these might need to be replaced. However, the solution proved to be more straightforward in that each door could be removed and taken back to the joinery workshop in Dent for a day, any decay cut out and sections replaced. The tongued and grooved panels were replaced as necessary, and the doors brought back to site as good as new whilst retaining any historic integrity. Philip and Edwin worked wonders. This would indeed be the way we would progress with the other doors where necessary.



*And not forgetting Reg!*



*The windows after being painted by Steven Alderson (July 2022)*

It is a fact that skilled tradesmen are usually in high demand, and this was certainly so of all the people we were using and daily attendance cannot be guaranteed for they will often be juggling several jobs keeping customers happy. For the uninitiated requiring certainty this method of working is sometimes disconcerting, but they always get there in the end and we have learned to be patient and work on this basis; it is critical to allow sufficient time in any programme. One thing is for sure there are no better people to be working with and we have not been let down yet.



*Kish Carey curtain making and Ken McClurg sign painting (July 2022)*

Whilst the work was ongoing we took the opportunity of tackling the painting to the car park fence and gates which were looking a little tired and are now much improved. In addition, we attended to internal jobs including curtain making and repairs these being undertaken by Kish Carey. Incidentally, the curtains are quite a challenge with some of them being a 3.8m (13ft) drop! Even removing the curtains for maintenance is a challenge whilst perched on a ladder and trying to support the weight. We also decided that it was time to refurbish the large kitchen table, the centre piece of the kitchen, which was sent to Tony Knight, a restorer in Skipton.

However, we have certainly had some unnerving moments and it was not until the last day before the guests arrived that the scaffolding to the front disappeared – the scaffolder working on a just in time basis! No one was more relieved than myself. All in all, it was regarded as a successful works period with some major achievements although there were some areas of external redecoration to be left until September 2022 shut down.

## A Major Milestone – Installation of the West Window

As previously mentioned, we were able to gain listed building consent for the west window on 4<sup>th</sup> August 2022. This gave a fairly tight timeframe for installation in September but Wonder of Wood, based in Stainforth, got to work straight away. The new window would be manufactured in Accoya, a resilient softwood more accepting of paint, and fortunately the precaution had been taken of ordering the necessary timber well in advance. Due to global supply problems this had been a potential issue.

We visited the Wonder of Wood workshop to observe manufacture and it was truly a large chunk of timber. The new window duly arrived on site on 16<sup>th</sup> September 2022 and was installed by a team of four. This was indeed a milestone day and one we had thought might not ever happen. It was not before time too as the existing window disintegrated as it was removed. It is fair to say that it probably would not have lasted another season as some of the timber had turned to mulch. The window was then plastered in by our friend, Julian Wilkinson from Dent.

Whilst the new window is simple in its design, not having the ornate detailing and small panes as the platform facing windows, the plus point is that it does give an uninterrupted view down the valley and is therefore popular with the guests. Some initially teething problems encountered during the first heavy rainfall and driving wind were quickly rectified and the window is fit for purpose. We are most grateful to Robert Handy of Wonder of Wood who has patiently stayed with us through the planning process. It was probably around 18 months from beginning to end but we got there!

Meanwhile, the opportunity was taken for Steven Alderson to carry out the remaining redecoration as we had simply run out of time in July. The w/c block external door was removed for overhaul by Philip and Edwin Middleton and given the same renovation treatment as the front doors. Defective panelling including a redundant cat flap left from the residential occupation replaced with Tricoya. The w/c block windows were also refurbished and rehung.





*Removal of old and installation of new window by Wonder of Wood 16<sup>th</sup> September 2022  
(photos 1 & 2 courtesy of Ken McClurg)*

Ken McClurg proved that he was also very handy with a paint brush and whilst not wishing to offend Steven, the professional decorator, we were all wielding a paint brush at the end of the last day. Incidentally, Ken also took on the restoration of the station clock face which now looks the part.



*The restored W Potts & Sons station clock now looks the part (September 2022)*



*Importantly, the view through the window!*

One longstanding irritation had been the leaning heritage gas light in the car park. OK, Dent station never had a gas supply and, for that matter, for most of its existence, not even electricity! This was a more recent addition probably from an architectural salvage yard and later converted to



electricity. However, it was somewhat dilapidated, lopsided and the lamp hanging off the top. It did not give the correct impression to our visitors.



*Ken McClurg in his element, painting the bathroom external door and fire buckets.*

Despite trying, we could not get a builder to look at the cast iron lamp standard within the time frame and so we set about excavating with a spade. Fortunately, we were able to correct the lean without lifting the standard out which would have probably needed a crane anyway. It looks a lot better. We removed the actual fitting to store and restoration will be a forthcoming project.

We concluded that 2022 was yet another successful work period albeit with much still to be accomplished.

## Pettril Bridge and a Fuel Crisis

Whilst talking about the station it is difficult to detach from events along the line. The Eden Brows landslip was one such event in recent memory which, so easily, could have had a long-lasting effect on the future for the line. However, another such catastrophe occurred on 19<sup>th</sup> October 2022 when a freight train carrying cement from Clitheroe to Scotland derailed on the points at Pettril Bridge Junction, just outside Carlisle. The points are located above a bridge carrying the line over the River Pettril and, as a result of the derailment, several heavy cement wagons ended up in the river below with significant damage to the bridge and track. The cause of the catastrophe was something as simple as a 'wheel flat' which should have been detected.

A recovery operation was swiftly implemented to remove the wagons and repair the damage to infrastructure. Meanwhile, services were truncated at Appleby with a resultant emergency timetable and temporary bus service. In the event, it was 49 days before services were eventually restored on 7<sup>th</sup> December 2022. It rather demonstrates the fragility of the line to such events.

Prior to 2022 very few could have ever imagined the Ukraine situation or indeed the Covid pandemic and yet these world events have both had a significant impact on our operation in Dent. We are dependent on oil (kerosene) for heating along with many rural properties. Whilst ground source heating might have been an option to consider at one time, the problems are significant plus disruption to the property: the necessity for large diameter pipework. For a property such as Dent it

would not have worked. In any case we were stuck with oil as our chosen fuel. It is fair to say that the fuel crisis presented an unsettling moment as costs soared from 46p per litre as recently as December 2020 to £1.10 per litre in October 2022, an increase of 139%. Heating oil was not subject to a price cap unlike other fuels. Thankfully, costs have now settled down to a new 'norm'.

Coal was also becoming more costly although partly due to a drive to move households away from fossil fuels and towards reconstituted smoke-free products. Ordinary coal will soon be outlawed. However, we have an excellent local coal merchant, Dawsons in Sedbergh who trundle up the hill once a month during the winter. The station is indeed fuel hungry but who would deny our guests a real coal fire and heating?

## The Staycation Revival

One feature of the Covid pandemic was the revival of the 'Staycation' following the initial relaxation of the lock down restrictions, briefly in 2020 and then again in 2021. Foreign holidays were not available and there was a rush to seek any holiday opportunity in the UK. Some establishments were undoubtedly beneficiaries of this surge in demand and prices dramatically increased in response.

Certainly, we saw a few folks who were probably more used to being in a hotel in Spain, but it was not long before things settled down. We certainly did not rush to increase prices as with some establishments. By 2022 we were back to what could, most likely, be regarded as



*The Staycation Express passes Dent Station in September 2021*

normality with flights to foreign destinations now available. Thankfully, we generally remained fully booked with guests who appreciate the house for what it is, for without this income we would not be able to carry out the necessary conservation work.

We like to think that we know our guests, many of which are repeat customers and we do take every effort to make contact upon their arrival. Also, we are on hand in the rare event that things go wrong. This is generally appreciated and the positive remarks in the visitor book are testament to this. Whilst the house is 'work in progress' guest satisfaction is important to us.

Meanwhile, we have seen an increased passenger use of Dent Station particularly during the summer months. Walking groups often alight. However, we still see occasional visitors unprepared for the distance to the village assuming, blindly, that there must, at least, be a pub or a tea-room nearby. Also, some are caught out by the long wait between services which can be up to 4 hours in the afternoon. However, what a view on a fine day! Perhaps there is scope for a pop-up tearoom as a side line!



*60163 Tornado passing Dent Station 21<sup>st</sup> October  
2021*

One consequence of the increase in patronage is that we even had people walking into the property on occasions despite the 'private' signs asking 'if they can buy a ticket for the steam train' or use the facilities. It is sometimes necessary to remind that the S&C is not a heritage railway but a strategic part of the national network. Naturally, we do our best to point them in the right direction.

A regular feature of the S&C is the number of charter trains passing, many of these hauled by well-known steam locomotives

and slotted between the scheduled services. This certainly brings out another breed of visitor to Dent Station, the railway photographer. Photographers can appear in considerable numbers and the platform and bridge can be full of the sound of clicking cameras.

On rare occasions there can be more than one steam service in a day but in September 2022 two trains were scheduled to pass nearby, the well-informed suggesting Garsdale as the likely passing place. Positions were staked in eager anticipation, however, in the event, one of the trains was delayed by a few minutes. The first train appeared at the station travelling northbound and exactly at that moment the second train passed out of sight behind it with much whistling. The chances of this happening are about as small as seeing a total eclipse of the sun. However, a few lucky folks did get to see both!



*46100 Royal Scot passes Dent Station 16th June  
2022*

Sadly, the Staycation train which had been a feature of 2020 and 2021, no longer ran in 2022. This was an experimental open-access service which it was hoped would demonstrate the viability of a premium tourist train. The service was undoubtedly excellent but failed to gain sufficient passenger numbers coupled with difficulties in accessing the major conurbation of Leeds. No doubt valuable lessons were learned in the process.



## Part of the Community

It had probably not occurred to us when we started but our need to find suitable tradesmen has forged a valuable link with the local community and we have continued to support those businesses where we can. This even applies to suppliers in the days when often a cheaper alternative can often be obtained with recourse to the internet. In turn, this has reaped rewards in the positive response we have received, and it is clear that all of the tradesmen have enjoyed coming up to the station which is something of a novelty, well at least on a fine day. We work closely with our local tradesmen and suppliers all of whom, without exception, we regard as friends.

As readers will recall from earlier, the Friends' connection with Dent Station was already long since established through financial support to the Western Dales Community Bus which makes an appearance a couple of times on a Saturday throughout the year with an extra evening service during the summer months. This is, without doubt, an important feature of the station and provides an onward connection to Dent village, Sedbergh and Kendal.



*Western Dales Community Bus descends the Coal Road on the S1 Saturday morning journey from Dent Station to Kendal and the bus stop sign is finally installed.*

This is in contrast to many rural stations these days that cannot boast the luxury of a bus link. It is indeed a tribute to the team of dedicated local WDB volunteers who drive the bus and keep the service going. The bus stop sign is located just outside the station car park although the bus waits in the car park itself. The station can therefore justifiably claim to be the highest bus rail interchange in the country at 1150ft!

It was through a chance phone call from a contact a few years ago that the bus was featured in a BBC news item about the decline of rural buses and the attempts of locals to address the problem including a short film entitled 'Why We Drive Our Own Buses' which is still available to see on-line. Following the piece, many media enquiries flooded in and even a live on-air phone call from Venessa Feltz to the driver of the bus (whilst stationary)! It is thought that a significant grant received shortly afterwards was an indirect result of the BBC film which portrayed a rather compelling case of the need for rural buses.

We also have a regular column in the Sedbergh Lookaround, an excellent parish magazine published monthly with roughly 1000 circulation and, each edition, usually approaching 100 pages. It is full of local news and historical items, and, for our part, we have been able to provide a regular update on our activities at the station plus news on the railway and usually a ramble into public transport matters in general. There can't be many residents of the valley who don't know what we've been doing.

It is not all work though as the periods of shut down have enabled us to give impromptu guided tours to some of the many visitors who arrived at Dent Station. One day this even included a group of local primary school children and their parents returning from a trip. The spiral staircase was an immediate hit. This is an excellent opportunity to show off our asset to the wider world whilst most of the time it is let to paying guests. It should be said that we avoid letting the house to families with small children due to the obvious dangers of being a railway station but, less obvious, the sudden drop down to Monkey Beck which might prove tempting.

Sadly, our nearest neighbour Roy Holmes from Station Master's House passed away in September 2022 after a long illness. Roy and his late wife, Jenny, had been stalwart supporters of the line having moved up from Batley in the mid-1970s. Roy, a keen caver and lover of the outdoors, had, in a former career, been a founder of the Craghopper clothing brand. Station Master's House had been an ongoing project and he had not quite managed to see the work completed. Incidentally, history records that this was one of the first properties in the country to have rudimentary double glazing and probably what we would refer to as 'secondary' these days.



*Southbound train passing (July 2022)*

## Repointing

2023 arrived and having attended to most of the priority issues it was time to return our attention to the pointing which would have been a lime mortar in times gone by, some of which, we believe, still exists today. The walls are largely coarse local sandstone with dressed stone quoins at the corners and generally around 500-600mm thick. The stonework is largely in excellent condition due to the high quality of the original Midland construction.

However, the pointing was in a poor state of repair and, whilst it was never going to cause the building to collapse, it was considered to be responsible for much of the damp on the west elevation. Some attempt had been made to replace the pointing with cement mortar however this comes with problems. Cement mortar sets hard and does not have the ability to flex in the same way as lime mortar. This lack of flexibility in turn causes damage to the softer sandstone and is

entirely inappropriate for this type of building. Moreover, the small cracks which form allow water to penetrate causing frost damage and it is often said that upon removing such mortar this releases a rush of water which has simply been trapped behind.

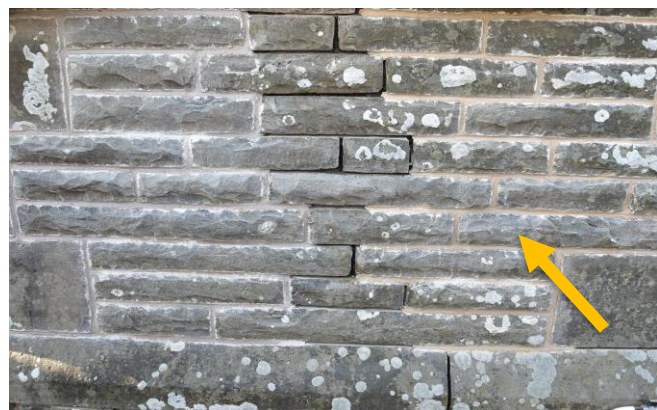
We were therefore committed to replacing in a more traditional lime mortar suitable to the building and advice was taken from Tim Wells at Eden Hot Lime, local manufacturers of lime mortar, based, not too far away, in Great Musgrave in the Eden Valley. Indeed, they are suppliers and consultants to historic buildings including the National Trust and English Heritage properties, so we had certainly come to the right place. Whilst we had included repointing in our 2021 listed building application with the Yorkshire Dales National Park, other works simply had to take priority. Nevertheless, we had approval subject to a condition of inspection by the listed building officer and provided that we started the work within 3 years.



*Showing a typical joint with original lime mortar*

First of all, a few words about lime mortar for which I am indebted to Eden Hot Lime. This is a centuries-old proven technology originating from Roman times, if not before, and evidenced by a considerable number of lime kilns dotted around the Dales. Limestone (or calcium carbonate) is heated to become calcium oxide otherwise known as quicklime. When then mixed with water this becomes calcium hydroxide and over a period this will absorb carbon dioxide from the atmosphere to once again become calcium carbonate. This is known as the 'lime cycle'. Whilst in the calcium hydroxide form it is mixed with sand to make a hot mortar, setting occurring with the absorption of carbon dioxide. To aid the setting process a pozzolan is added which, in Roman times, would have been volcanic ash although other materials are often used such as terracotta pot dust or china clay.

Sample mixes were delivered to site in April 2023, and we requested Julian Wilkinson to carry out the necessary sample panels on the boiler room end-elevation from which it became clear that the preferable mix would be 1 part quicklime, 2 parts yellow sand, 1 part limestone dust plus a china clay pozzolan. This was partly dictated by the particularly fine joints at Dent requiring a smaller sized aggregate and also the feeling that it gave a better match to the existing sandstone.



*Sample panels with the chosen mortar mix on the right-hand side.*

The necessary Discharge of Conditions form was sent off to the listed building officer at the National Park with photographs of the sample panels and on 5<sup>th</sup> May we received the final



approval, deeming that a further visit by the inspector was not required in this instance. We were, therefore, clear to go ahead and with an 8-week planned shutdown imminent from 11<sup>th</sup> May 2023.

Julian quickly mobilised his team comprising local craftsmen Shamus and Rob and set to work tentatively removing the lower level of the mortar from the west elevation. This released some of the retained water held behind the cement mortar and allowed drying out to commence. Within a few days the works were significantly progressing and the scaffolding arrived, initially to the west elevation and north gable. At this point, the building was shrouded in blue netting to protect from the sunlight, behind which, the builders worked away unseen, emerging for occasional tea breaks.

I was despatched up to Great Musgrave to collect the initial batch of lime mortar from Eden Hot Lime. The mixing facility can be best described as a timeless process located in a very rural setting ¼ mile along a farm access road. The mortar was premixed for us by Tim Wells and supplied in tubs. I loaded as much in as I thought the suspension of the car would take and tentatively set off back to Dent Station, avoiding potholes, to make a return visit the following day.



*Julian remixing the lime mortar and pointing in progress*

On arrival at site the mortar was then re-mixed by Julian adding the china clay pozzolan. The material was then applied in very small quantities using a pallet tool or a 6.5mm wide 'tuck pointing tool'. It was a slow process indeed, each day the work being covered by hessian cloth and, over successive days, brushed down, sprayed with water and maintained. We were advised to keep the work fully covered with hessian for at least 2 weeks thereafter to prevent excessive drying.



At the start we were by no means certain how much pointing we would be able to accomplish in the 8-week period, but it did seem to gather pace as the team gained confidence and after about 5 weeks a decision was made to also scaffold and repoint the north gable on the platform elevation. Thus, by the end we had completed 75% of the wall area leaving 25% to be completed in 2024. The scaffolding was removed at the beginning of July and the building was positively glowing when viewed from the valley. Julian, Shamus and Rob had done an excellent job and a credit to Dentdale tradesmen! Thanks must also go to Tim Wells for his invaluable support and advice.



*'Black 5' 44392 passes Dent on 1<sup>st</sup> July 2023 with the building still shrouded in blue netting*

Meanwhile, the opportunity was taken to refurbish the Porter's Room double doors which were in a poor state of repair. Our good friend Philip Middleton removed the doors back to his workshop in Dent village and using the tried and tested process cut out areas of timber decay, replacing with sound timber. The doors were returned to site fully refurbished.



*Completed repointing taken on 6<sup>th</sup> July 2023*

We also carried out some external painting to the windows and Porter's doors in a very piecemeal fashion working around the ongoing works and utilising the, by now, well-established partnership of McLurg and Carey. A few windows remain until the next works period in 2024.

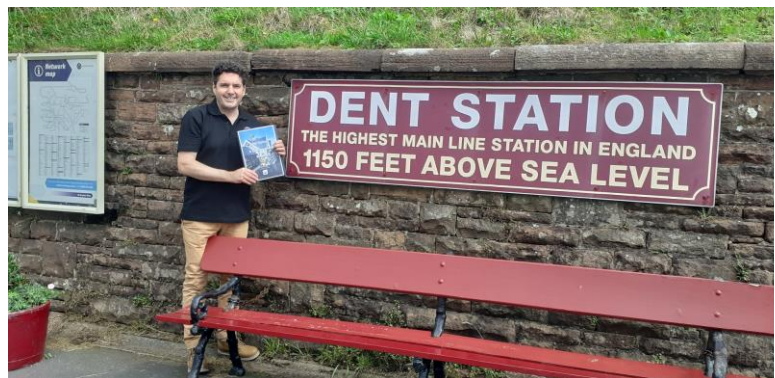
We have become well-practised at the routine of transition from building site to self-catering establishment and with Diane's help we were able to complete and prepare the house just in time for the arrival of our guests on 8<sup>th</sup> July!

## The Rail Minister Pays a Visit

Industrial action on the railway was unfortunately a dominant feature of the latter part of 2022 and all through 2023. Effectively, this meant no services at all for the S&C on strike days. Naturally, this impacted greatly on the tourist industry and the ability for folks to go about their daily business. On those days Dent Station became eerily quiet but for the visitors arriving by road simply to stand on the platform of England's highest main line station.

In amongst the numerous strikes, we received advance warning that Huw Merriman MP, the rail minister, was to pay a flying visit to Ribbleshead, Dent and Appleby on 17<sup>th</sup> August 2023. Of course, the house would be fully booked and so the most we could offer was a walk around the outside. Naturally, we felt it wise to forewarn the guests but, much to my surprise, they kindly suggested that they would be prepared to invite the minister in.

The day arrived and we assembled at the station together with representatives from Northern Rail, Network Rail and the Friends. The minister arrived and we were able to explain a little of the work we had been doing and presented an early version of this booklet. Upon scanning the first few pages of the booklet it became apparent that the minister had been acquainted with



*Huw Merriman MP holding a copy of the Dent booklet.*

the late John Disney during his time serving on the Transport Select Committee. The opportunity was also taken to impress that this was also the highest bus/rail interchange in the country and we provided the minister with a copy of the Western Dales Bus timetable just to prove it!

Whilst waiting for the 1217 northbound train to Appleby the 1213 southbound to Leeds arrived and departed. It seemed opportune to mention that the latter would in fact be the last southbound train for nearly 4 hours due to the timetable deficiencies which we had long contested! Anyway, all seemed to go well with the visit and the allotted 45 minutes went by very quickly, no doubt leaving our guests with something to tell their friends and relations when they got home.



Various charter trains passed through the station during the year to the delight of our guests and onlookers including the Flying Scotsman and the Blue Pullman. These are a vital part of the mix which gives the line its unique quality.

Once or twice a year the railway is blockaded for engineering works and a rail replacement bus (RRB) service implemented. On these occasions Dent Station is not served for good reasons, the narrow roads and bridges being impassable to a full-sized bus. Indeed, a taxi would normally be arranged for any intending rail passengers.



*The Blue Pullman passes Dent Station on 5 July 2023*

However, on one memorable occasion, in September 2023, a hapless bus driver on a rail replacement service departed Garsdale Station, accidentally taking the Coal Road towards Dent instead of the normal route via Hawes. After a white-knuckle ride, rising to 1750ft above sea level, the driver might have thought he was home and dry however one can only imagine the horror as the steep bends going into Cowgill came into sight! Nevertheless, the bus was negotiated around the sharp bends in several manoeuvres.

Emerging at the bottom of the hill a concerned resident came to the assistance of the, by now, shaken driver, advising that there was no way out towards Ribbleshead or even Dent village. In fact, the only option was to go back the way he had just come! Surely, this was a mistake never to be repeated!



*The start of the Coal Road at Cowgill*



*A rare sight indeed! – the 'RRB' climbing the Coal Road (courtesy Diane Wharton)*

2023 also marked the eventual connection of the southbound customer information screen which had been erected some 3 years earlier but lay out of use but for want of a connecting cable under the tracks, permission for which was bogged down in railway bureaucracy! For three years, only the northbound screen was connected and, for some bizarre reason, this seemed to show both

platforms, leading to some inevitable confusion as to which platform was which, and even, passengers waiting on the wrong platform only to see their train appear on the opposite side. Happily, all is now rectified and no longer will we have to come to the aid of passengers waiting on the platform wanting to know where their train is.

## And Finally....

Our thanks must go to the people who have assisted during the process and keeping the house going on a day-to-day basis, whether housekeeping, tradesmen or volunteers. A full list is appended.

It is gratifying to see the station catching the eye of the many folks passing on the train and the clicking of cameras pressed against the carriage windows. Also, the many favourable comments from our guests and the folk who we have been able to invite in while we have been working have made it all worthwhile.

Whilst we can reflect on some significant progress over the period since acquisition this is an ongoing story which will need to be continually updated. We cannot be complacent. Our priority remains the conservation of the building after which we hope to be able to make a financial return. In the meantime, the house is sure to throw up some challenges which we need to be ready to meet and we will. We are but temporary custodians of what is a nationally important building.

John Carey

February 2023

Revised January 2024



## Chronology of Key Events

<b>4th September 2020</b>	FoSCL acquire the station with handover ceremony.
<b>Sept -Nov 2020</b>	Phase 1 - Initial works on electrical and fire alarm installations. Redecoration of Booking Hall. Replacement of linen and household goods etc.
<b>23<sup>rd</sup> December 2020</b>	We welcome our first guests
<b>1<sup>st</sup> January 2021</b>	Further period of Covid lock down restrictions imposed.
<b>April 2021</b>	We reopen for guests following relaxation of restrictions.
<b>8<sup>th</sup> May 2021</b>	Use of the house by a film company.
<b>20<sup>th</sup> May 2021</b>	Listed building application for roof repair, pointing and window. Window removed from application.
<b>1<sup>st</sup> June 2021</b>	Listed building consent for roof repair.
<b>7<sup>th</sup> September 2021</b>	Phase 2 - The west gable roof work commences. Scaffolding installed and roof stripped. New barge board, purlins and joists installed, and roof replaced (8 weeks).
<b>16<sup>th</sup> September 2021</b>	The boiler installation work commences.
<b>14<sup>th</sup> December 2021</b>	Preplanning for west window submitted.
<b>29<sup>th</sup> March 2022</b>	Listed building application submitted to YDNP for west window.
<b>13<sup>th</sup> June 2022</b>	Phase 3 - Start of redecoration/repair of high-level joinery and restoration of platform window, porch door refurbishment. Platform elevation scaffolded. (6 weeks).
<b>14<sup>th</sup> June 2022</b>	Refusal of listed building application for window and further discussion with YDNP.
<b>4<sup>th</sup> August 2022</b>	Listed building consent for west window granted by YDNP.
<b>5<sup>th</sup> September 2022</b>	Phase 4 - External redecoration continued, and refurbishment of bathroom external door commenced. Manufacture and installation of west window (4 weeks).
<b>16<sup>th</sup> September 2022</b>	Installation of west window.
<b>5<sup>th</sup> May 2023</b>	'Discharge of Conditions received from YDNP for sample pointing panel
<b>11<sup>th</sup> May 2023</b>	Phase 5 – Repointing external elevations in lime mortar commences and building scaffolded. External painting continues and refurbishment of Porter's double doors undertaken
<b>7<sup>th</sup> July 2023</b>	Phase 5 finishes with 75% of the repointing completed.
<b>17<sup>th</sup> August 2023</b>	Huw Merriman MP, the rail minister visits Dent Station
<b>May 2024</b>	Planned completion of repointing (Phase 6)



## Acknowledgements

The local tradesmen and suppliers who have worked with us to date:

- Steven Alderson (Sedbergh) - decorator
- Philip and Edwin Middleton (Dent) - joinery
- Julian Wilkinson (Dent) assisted by Rob, Sam and Shamus – building and roofing.
- Roger Keighley (Sedbergh) - electrician.
- Gary Sedgwick and family (Cowgill) - plumbing
- Chris Pickthall (New Hutton) – electrician (for heating installation)
- Steven Graham of Cumbria Pumps (Kendal) – water system
- Robert Handy of Wonder of Wood (Stainforth) – joinery manufacture
- David Labbate (Garsdale) – septic tank removal
- Chapmans (Sedbergh) – chimney sweep
- Gordon Sproul of Treadwell Flooring (Sedbergh) – carpet cleaning
- Bill Dawes (Kendal) – boiler servicing
- Mark Stoker (Dent) – transport
- Castle Fire (Kendal) – fire extinguishers
- Dawsons Fuels (Sedbergh)
- Out of Eden (Kirkby Stephen) – linen and household supplies
- Tony Knight (Skipton) – furniture restoration
- Tim Wells, Eden Hot Lime (Great Musgrave) - Lime mortar specialist
- Roger Iveson (Askrigg) – domestic appliances.
- Chris Townson, Kendal Blinds

Volunteers who have assisted over the period:

- Colin Lockett - planting, legal and general support
- Kish Carey - household
- Ken McClurg - grounds, painting and anything else
- Paul Kampen - support
- Josie Perriman, Cynthia and Peter Hardiman - planting
- Marion and John Armstrong - decorating prep
- Cliff Johnson - painting
- Richard Morris - website
- Edward Album - legal
- Joanne Crompton and Damian Smith – finance
- Pete Shaw – botany
- Charles Dorin – architectural support
- Paul Brown - support
- Anthony Ward and John Dodds – grounds

Our regular housekeeper: Diane Wharton (and Ian Goff who provides back up).

Bookings administrator: Rachel Griffiths

Western Dales Community Bus volunteers for providing my transport from Dent Station

Apologies to anybody missing!