

Heart of England CRP Annual Report 2024/25



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Chair's Report



It is a pleasure to introduce the Heart of England Community Rail Partnership Annual Report for 2024/25. You will notice that this report arrives a little later than intended. That is not through inactivity, quite the opposite. The Partnership has continued to deliver at pace, and while projects have moved forward, partnerships have grown and communities have been engaged, the quiet discipline of reporting has had to wait its turn. What follows, therefore, is not a retrospective of a concluded chapter, but a snapshot taken while the work continues at full speed.

Five years on from our formation, we remain focused on connecting communities across Coventry, Solihull and Warwickshire with their railway. In the first five years we led 73 projects, worked with 60 schools, engaged over 3,000 students through workshops and assemblies, and enabled more than 700 people to take part in rail confidence trips. Behind each figure is real impact: young people exploring rail careers, families building confidence to travel, volunteers shaping stations into places of pride and belonging, and these figures have increased over the past year.

Our activity continues to reflect the Partnership's core purpose: promoting rail as a sustainable and accessible form of travel, bringing diverse communities together, supporting local economic and social value, and strengthening the relationship between people and place. Education, inclusivity, station enhancements and sustainability are not separate workstreams but interconnected parts of a shared ambition.

My thanks go to our officers, Julia Singleton-Tasker and Sarah Davison, whose energy and professionalism drive the Partnership forward, to our host authority Warwickshire County Council and to our Steering Group members, funding partners and volunteers whose commitment underpins everything we achieve.

As we look ahead there is no sense of slowing. Community rail in the Heart of England remains active, relevant and ambitious and I am proud to chair a Partnership that continues to turn local connection into lasting value.

Malcolm Holmes, Chair, Heart of England Community Rail Partnership

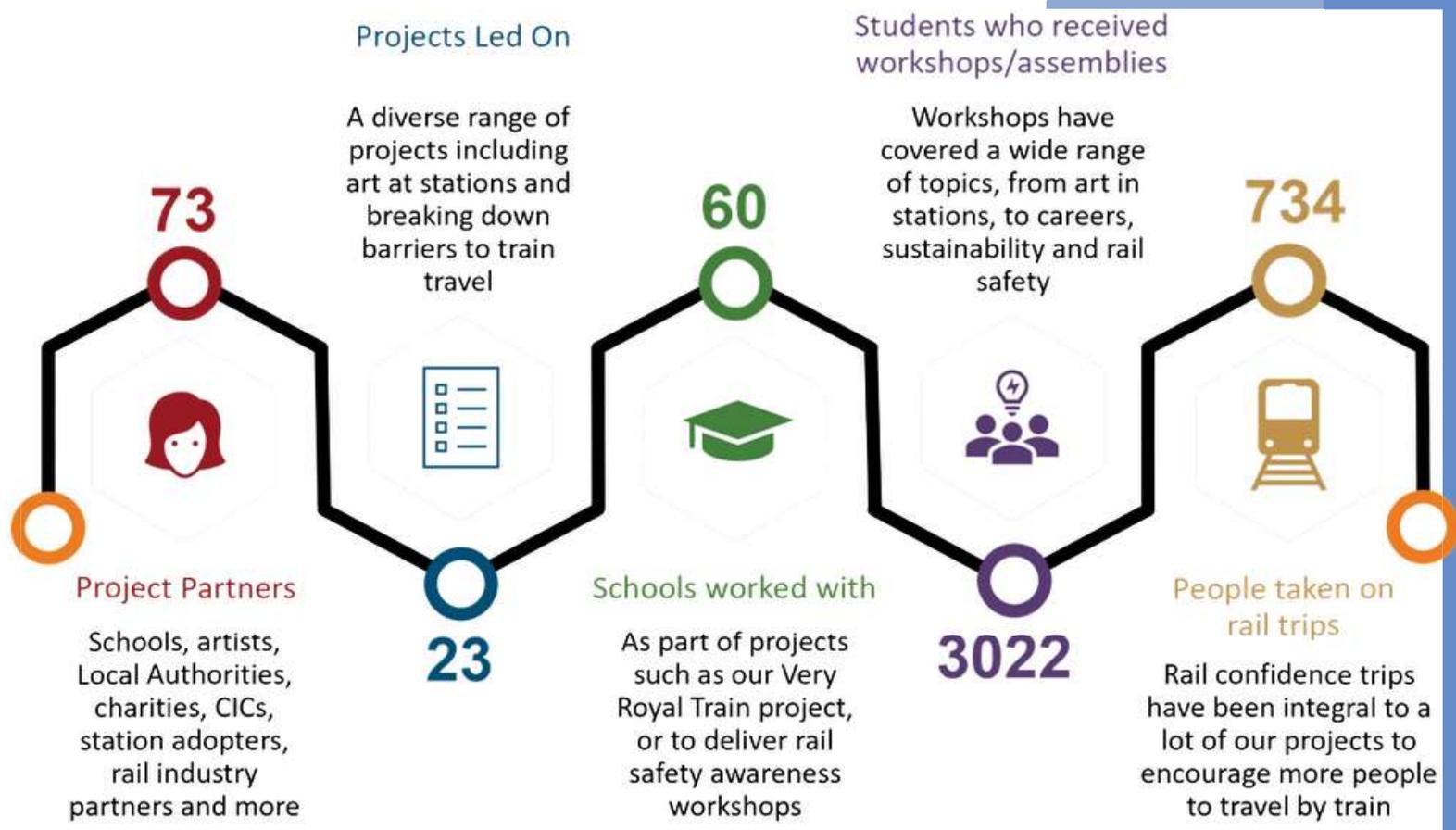
5 Year Celebration

In November we held a special celebration evening to mark 5 years since the start of the CRP. Held at the beautiful Leamington Spa Pump Rooms, we were joined by about 100 guests for an evening dedicated to showcasing the work of the CRP and the amazing station volunteers, project partners and individuals who have contributed so much to the community rail world in our area.

We were honoured to have the following speakers join us for the event: Mike Lamport from Railway200, Lifepath Trust Manger Melanie Kemble with Phillip Thomas and Freya Humphries, Katie O Art and West Coventry Academy Careers Lead Joanna Kerr.

You can view some [Vox Pops filmed from guests](#) in attendance by CRN partners BA Events.

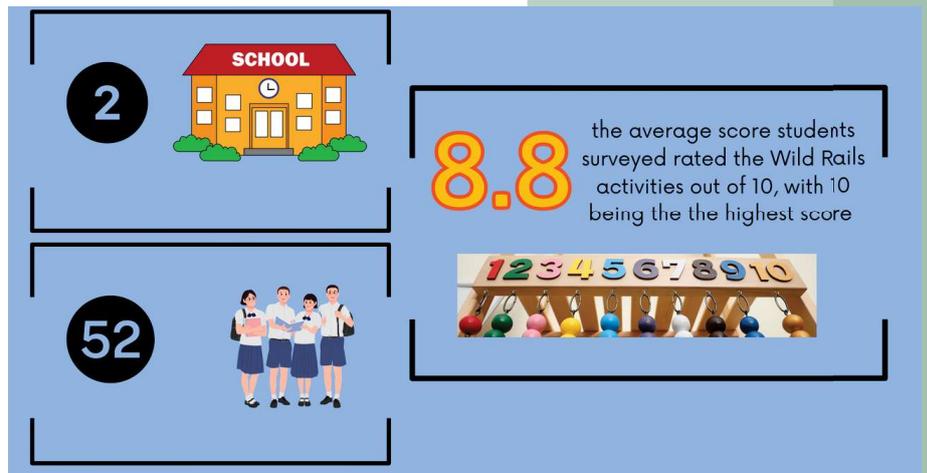
In preparation for Railway200, we worked with two local school - Earlsdon Primary in Coventry and Westgate Primary in Warwick running art workshops with Artist KatieOArt - Katie O’Sullivan. The four themes of Railway200 were explored with the students and used to create a banner that was unveiled on at our celebration evening.



Education

Wild Rails

We launched the Wild Rails biodiversity project education programme to help students learn about improving biodiversity at stations through a variety of curriculum based activities. Partnered with Warwickshire Wildlife Trust, learning was really brought to life through interactive games and experiencing the natural world. Both schools we worked with choose a bug hotel project and with help from our partners building merchants E H Smith, Network Rail and Friends of Lapworth Station, we saw two new bug hotels arrive at both Lapworth and Leamington Spa stations.



We received great feedback from teachers and students to help evaluate the project and make it even more meaningful for 2025.



Education

STEM5

January 2025 saw the completion of the STEM activity days with partners the Smallpiece Trust, funded by Cross Country.

These interactive sessions help students see the positives of an engineering career and identify opportunities in the Rail industry. These were days well spent designing gear or pulley motorised vehicles and their very own environmentally sustainable train station.



Over the 3 years of this long-running project

739 students have undertaken the Rail Challenge and an impressive 575 of them were awarded the recognised CREST Award!



Education



Feel Good Field Trips

We have continued to support the delivery in our area of CRL's Feel Good Field Trips programme in partnership with Avanti West Coast. These trips take school groups out on the train to travel to incredible places across Avanti's network. Some of the exciting destinations the Heart of England CRP has recently supported visits to are Starlight Express at Wembley Theatre with a cast dance workshop (above), Birmingham Botanical Gardens (left) for an *Animal Handling Experience* and a visit to Oxley Railway Depot to see the new Avanti Hitachi Evero fleet (below).



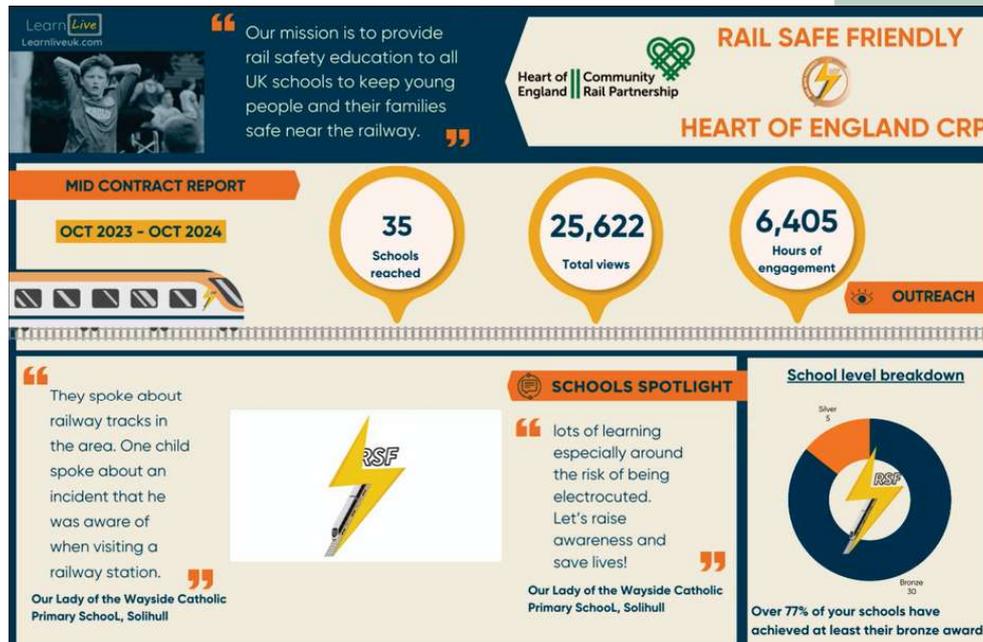
At Oxley Depot students got the opportunity to speak with a variety of Alstom Engineers and Avanti colleagues, whilst engaging on a series of STEM activities. A video from the day is available here tinyurl.com/OxleyDepot



Education

LearnLive

In October 2024, we renewed our contract with LearnLive to deliver the Rail Safe Friendly programme in the Midlands, with funding provided for engagement with 45 schools.



Careers Day at West Cov

Continuing with our work with schools we visited West Coventry Academy in July to provide a day's overview of a wide variety of careers in the rail industry for Year 10 students, many of which the students had not contemplated before. We were extremely fortunate to have a visit from Jenny and Tim, Train Driver Managers from CrossCountry who talked through their impressive careers and how students could start thinking about job entry routes. They ran through some driver aptitude tests, which went down a storm!



Station & Neighbourhood Enhancements

Dorridge Ticket Office

We were delighted to be invited to the opening of the refurbished ticket office at Dorridge Station on the 17th May. The project, funded by Chiltern Railways Community Investment Fund and delivered with support from the Friends of Dorridge Station and ourselves, included a full refurbishment of the ticket hall and the preservation of historic features, including parquet flooring from the 1930s. This is the third major project supported by the Friends of Dorridge Station, who have also delivered upgrades to the waiting rooms at the station, as well as 'pick your own' herb beds and colourful planters.



Nomination of Rugby CP for Community Rail Award

Our Rugby Colour Palette was shortlisted for the Community Creative Projects & Station Arts Award at this year's Community Rail Awards held in Newcastle. Unfortunately, we didn't win but it was an honour for the value of our project to be recognised.



Lapworth Station Water Pipe

Friends of Lapworth Station gathered with Fraser Pithie from Network Rail and Sarah Davison from the Heart of England CRP to celebrate the unveiling of a new water pipe stand. The new installation will make a huge difference to the all important garden and planter maintenance at the station, especially in the summer months. Volunteers are the back-bone of this close knit and expanding adopters group and from the picture below you can see has one very young recruit!



Inclusivity & Community Links

Rail Tales

Young people aged 6 to 21 years were invited to submit short stories inspired by trains or a railway journey for the chance to win an amazing railway-themed bundle of prizes, including a book bundle from independent bookshop Warwick Books.

The winners were:

17-21 Category

1st place: Sanjida Shakhawat (aged 18) *The Train Arrives at Dawn.*

12-16 Category

1st place: Laurie Bradley (aged 12) *The Final Draft.*

Runner-up: Jennifer Russell (aged 15) *The Perkins Family.*

6-11 Category

1st place: Elsa Dimambro (aged 8) *Molly the Mail Train Mouse.*

Runner-up: Yousef Nijib (aged 10) *The Ramblers' Railway.*

The entries were judged by representatives of the Heart of England Community Rail Partnership and the Literary Festival as well as the Roald Dahl Funny Prize-winning author and Literary Festival Ambassador Philip Ardagh. Philip is author of over 100 books including *Grubtown Tales*, *The Grunts* and *National Trust: The Secret Diary* series.

He said:

“A train journey is a promise of adventure. Even if you think you know where you’re going, you can never be quite sure who you might meet or what might happen along the way. A good story is like a train journey with a beginning, a middle and an end... some hurtling towards their destination, some taking their time, meandering onto branch lines, offering unexpected twists and turns. I was delighted to be asked to judge the festival’s writing competition in association with the Heart of England Community Rail Partnership to highlight 200 years of rail travel in 2025.”

We’ve included the 3 winning tales at the end of this report, or you can read them and the runner’s up at www.heartcommunityrail.org.uk/railtales.

Inclusivity & Community Links

Railway Explorations

Railway Explorations was a project funded by Chiltern Railways, designed to help refugees and asylum seekers in Coventry and Solihull to build their confidence and familiarity with the railways.

The project wanted people to feel comfortable navigating railway stations and know how to buy tickets, read timetables, and know who to ask for help if they need it.

To do this, rail confidence sessions and day trips were planned for Positive Youth Foundation and Coventry Refugee and Migrant Centre in Coventry, and in partnership with the Refugee and Resettlement Officers at Solihull MBC. As language can be a huge barrier to using the railways, they produced resources in 9 different languages that cover everything from the details of the participants' trips to the different types of tickets and other useful railway information.

The rail confidence sessions covered rail safety, how to buy tickets, reading timetables, and discovering where you can travel to from your local station.

The trips out offered a range of different activities, some more suited to families and others to adults only. They not only offered a variety of different experiences, but also the opportunity to explore different areas along the railway network.

As a direct result of the project, Solihull MBC are now re-evaluating how they work with their communities and are looking for ways to do more events which encourage communities to mix.

A summary of the legacy from the project:

- Guide to the railways in 9 key languages that have been shared with project partners.
- Solihull MBC have asked to continue to work with the CRP on future plans.
- WCC are talking to the CRP about providing people they work with who need to travel for education or employment opportunities with travel confidence training.



Sustainability

Stratford Pursuits Festival

We had a great day at the Stratford Pursuits Festival in May. We engaged with over 200 people, talking about and handing out leaflets about our Rail Trails. Links were made with numerous local groups and organisations who all have an interest in how we can live our lives more sustainably. There were also plenty of 4-legged friends who came to see us to find out new walks for them to discover with their owners!

Play Days

We were proud to be a part of the Play Days community day delivered by Highly Sprung Performance in partnership with Go Parks & Positive Youth Foundation. The Heart of England stall promoted Rail Trails, handed out wild flower seed packets and ran a competition to design a train wrap. We were inundated with entries and were super impressed with the artistic talents at Cash's Park in Coventry, with the top entries winning some arts and crafts prizes.

Launch of Value of Community Rail Report The launch of the Community Rail Network's latest report, "The Value of Community Rail," took place on September 26, 2024, at Coventry Station. The report, which highlights a social return on investment of nearly £18 for every £1 spent, features contributions from various community rail partnerships and volunteers, including the Heart of England CRP. The launch event was supported by the Rail Delivery Group and attended by representatives from the Department for Transport, with Mary Creagh MP also present to learn about local community rail activities.





THE YEAR IN NUMBERS

36

STATIONS

10

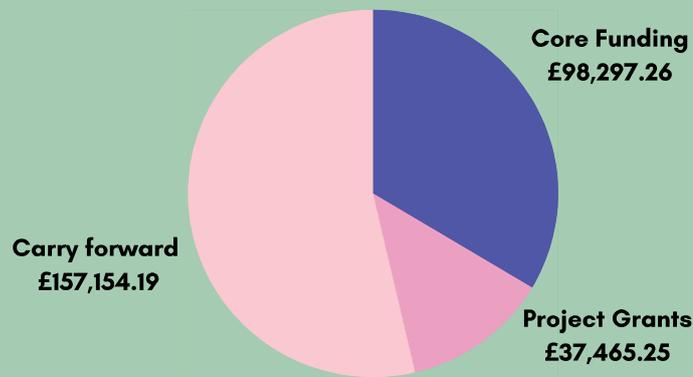
FUNDING PARTNERS

12

KEY PROJECTS AND EVENTS
DELIVERED

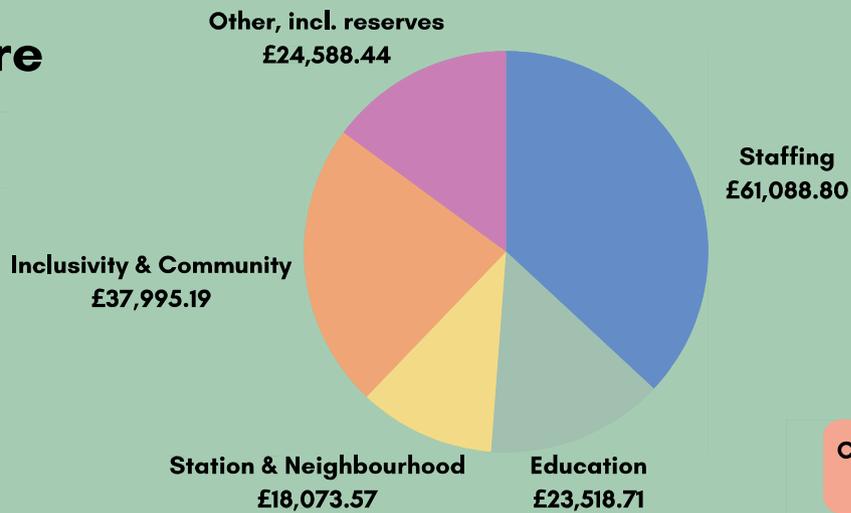
Income

TOTAL £292,916.70



Expenditure

TOTAL £165,264.71



**CARRY FORWARD TO FY
25/26: £127,651.99**



The Train Arrives at Dawn

by Sanjida Shakhawat

The first sounds of the galaxy was an engine roaring. Not a gentle hum, just enough for a quiet yell, from the old train. The Afternoon Express, arriving just on time, for the dawn of the baby Galaxy.

This Galaxy will be referred to as a station until given a name, as we have visitors travelling in and out, making stops, following the star map, it all seemed fitting. The first people deployed from the Afternoon Express were the workers. Space was a black canvas which they painted stars onto. And after the stars had all lighten up, the worlds can be unpacked from the train.

And now, the residents.

They won't remember, not until a few years of age, about the train. Our new humans housed onto a specific world, brimming with water, coated with leaves, and hugged by roots.

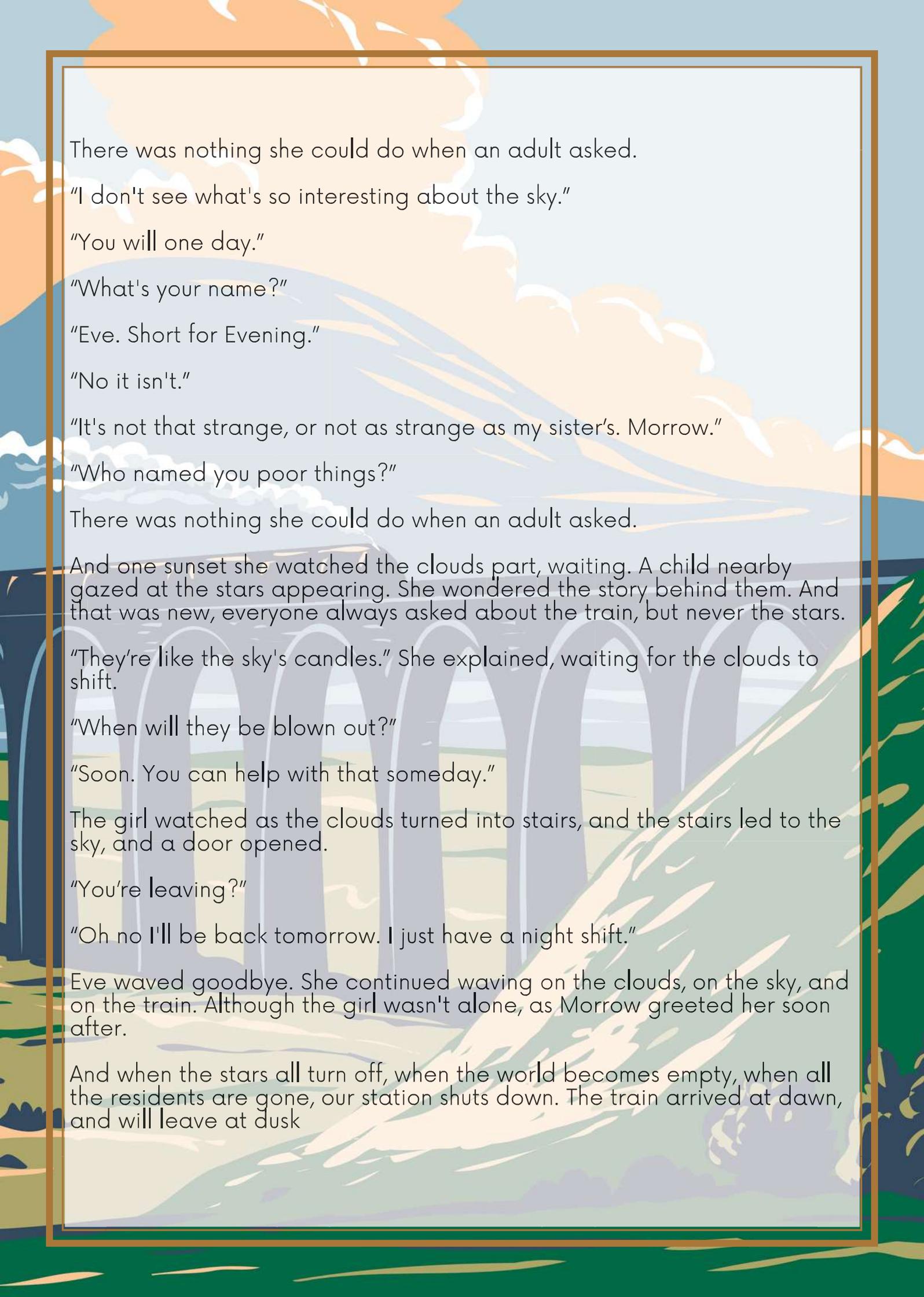
As you grew old, the train becomes a distant memory to you, and the sound of the engine becomes quiet. When the adults feared the thunder, the children knew it was the tired roars of the train. When a series of white moons flew through the clouds, the children knew it was the chain of wheels cascading down the tracks. And how the children just loved the tracks, as they rained through the clouds sometimes. Arches of light, coloured in strips from red to blue hues, disappearing just before hitting the ground.

And just as you regain your awareness of the world, the clouds, the thunder, the rainbows, the moons, you remember what all of those were. And this is when you regain your ticket for the Afternoon Express. What the children waited for, what the adults forgot, what the old earned.

And yet one girl has been on the train. Multiple times. And how could she? The workers never went inside the train, only built it and everything around it. The humans only had two opportunities, when they arrive to Earth, and their departure from it. So how could she?

She was a lonely adult who stared at the clouds and understood they are the fallen steam of the train, looking out for the wheels to peer from them. She waved and knew the conductor waved at her back.

And when the children asked what she was doing, she explained the train to them. Sometimes reminding the young ones of it or making sure the older ones don't forget.



There was nothing she could do when an adult asked.

"I don't see what's so interesting about the sky."

"You will one day."

"What's your name?"

"Eve. Short for Evening."

"No it isn't."

"It's not that strange, or not as strange as my sister's. Morrow."

"Who named you poor things?"

There was nothing she could do when an adult asked.

And one sunset she watched the clouds part, waiting. A child nearby gazed at the stars appearing. She wondered the story behind them. And that was new, everyone always asked about the train, but never the stars.

"They're like the sky's candles." She explained, waiting for the clouds to shift.

"When will they be blown out?"

"Soon. You can help with that someday."

The girl watched as the clouds turned into stairs, and the stairs led to the sky, and a door opened.

"You're leaving?"

"Oh no I'll be back tomorrow. I just have a night shift."

Eve waved goodbye. She continued waving on the clouds, on the sky, and on the train. Although the girl wasn't alone, as Morrow greeted her soon after.

And when the stars all turn off, when the world becomes empty, when all the residents are gone, our station shuts down. The train arrived at dawn, and will leave at dusk

The Final Draft: A Rail Tale

by Laurie Bradley

Slowly, the train pulled out of Bournemouth station and clattered out of the town into the English countryside.

The wooden table rattled with the rocking of the train. Wind whistled against the window, and it shuddered in its frame. Through it the sprawling green landscape rushed past.

Intently alert, Robert looked over the passengers sitting in the seats around him. The train rumbled on for a while before a man in a trench coat across from him, who had been looking out of the window, cleared his throat and as the train screeched Robert clearly heard above the commotion,

"Fancy seeing you here!"

Robert eyed the stranger in a confused way, trying to suppress the sense of danger mounting inside him. He picked up his brown velvet hat and stood up. Stretching, Robert lifted his briefcase down from the webbed netting.

Hurrying down the jolting aisle, he approached a varnished panel door, light glaring on its glass pane. Despite firmly pressing down on the handle, it would not open. Fearing it was locked, he turned back just as a distinguished gentleman appeared from the other side. Robert stepped through the aperture and out onto the open platform, grasping the ornate wrought iron railing. His shoulders swung as he stepped gingerly down to the bottom step, the summer gust pulling on his velvet hat and light frock coat. The brightness of the day stunned him.

Treading across to the next carriage, he found there were many more people inside and just one seat free, which Robert promptly occupied. He thought about the man who had spoken to him; he did not know anyone on this train. He shook his head, crossed and uncrossed his legs, and rested his eyes with his hand massaging his brow.

The train progressed at speed down the line past bridges and houses, hedges and ditches, charging along like troops in a battle.

Suddenly, a dark forest swelled into view. The many leaves cast a strange green glow into the carriage. In its gloom, Robert perceived figures twisting and snaking among the great shafts, but they were gone in a moment. White fungus crept over the trunks, coiling tendrils over the scarred bark. Robert shivered, his skin crawling as he focused his attention elsewhere.

Presently, Robert looked either side of him, noticing a woman holding a copy of The Times below her nose, her eyes flicking between him and the paper. The hubbub of the train rose and fell, and Robert breathed in time with it, steadying himself. His chest felt tight and crackled as he wheezed. He pulled his hat off once more and dabbed his hot brow with his handkerchief. The train lurched round a corner of the track and rising to his feet, Robert was thrust forward by its momentum, throwing him towards the door further along the coach separating a second seating section.

He found it to be empty, and let out a long breath. Robert sat down at a table and lay his briefcase under the window, slumping back into the velour seat, just as another person came in, and out of all the seats available seated himself in the one across from Robert.

This newcomer lay down a bundle of newspaper clippings before him and began to pick through them, lifting each from the table so that light penetrated through it. Robert let out a small gasp when he saw among them his own face. His breathing became rapid. His ears burned uncomfortably, and new droplets of perspiration formed on his forehead. A hand came down on his shoulder and Robert inhaled rapidly.

"Mind if I sit here, do you?" a woman asked.

Robert closed his eyes tight as she sat beside him. He pulled his coat collar up higher and pushed his hat further over his face.

Still the train pursued its destination down the line.

Robert watched the view escaping past the window. The sprawling green fields in the late summer weather were bathed in sunlight. Sunlight caught the yellows and golds of blonde corn heads. Sunlight shone on stone farmhouses. After a while, the movement of the landscape past him made him sick, the painted stations whistling by, and he returned his aggrieved gaze to the compartment. He noticed the bleached and worn fabric at the edges of the seat cushions, and imagined all the wear they received every day. He stared at this aberration, and bit his lip furiously, his heart racing.

Drumming his fingers on the window trim, Robert closed his eyes and tried to rest. He felt the woman's eyes on him and sharply turned his head away.

As London came into view, the train began to slow into the station. The green iron arches of the terminal engulfed the train like an open mouth, and the sound of the wheels on the tracks echoed grimly.

Robert bit at his nails violently as the train jolted to a standstill and the guard opened the door. He picked up his briefcase and smoothed his hat and coat. Dismounting the train, he tripped on the last step and stumbled onto the platform. Two firm hands caught him.

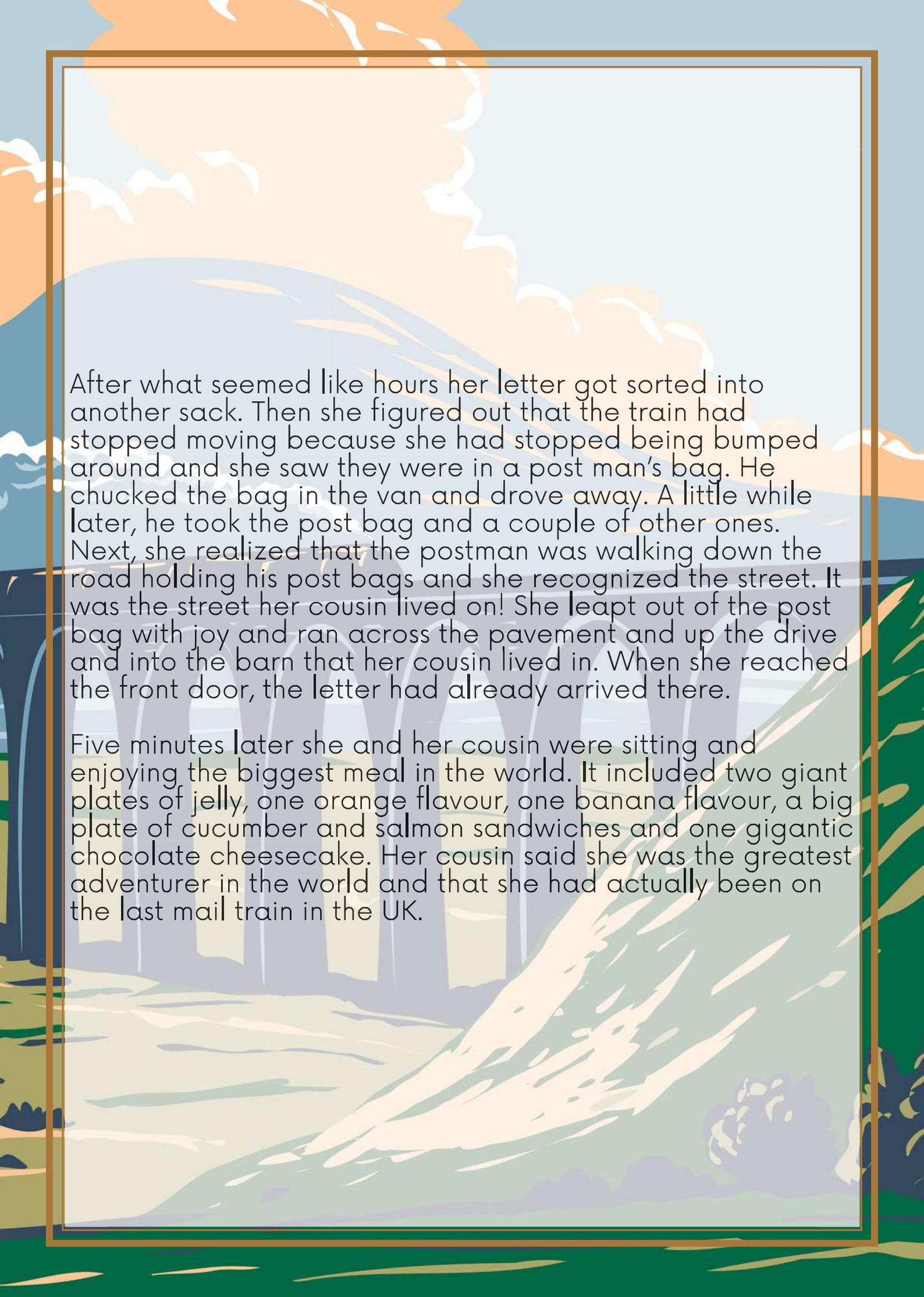
"Ah! Mr Stevenson? I'm Mr Benson, from Longman Green and Co., and I'm here to collect you. I trust you have the manuscript of your final draft?"

Molly the Mail Train Mouse

by Elsa Dimambro

The plump little white body with an extraordinarily long bright pink tail zipped through the tumbledown barn and out across the courtyard. The owner of the body was called Molly, and she had the greatest adventure ever to have happened in the mouse world, so this is how it happened. First, she was going to the post box at the end of the road to send a letter to her cousin to say that she was going to visit in a couple of days' time. After ten minutes of scurrying across the path she reached the post box. She climbed up to the letter slit, stood on top of the ledge and bent over upside down and threw the letter in, but her tail, which she was holding onto the ledge with, accidentally let go and she went tumbling down the hole. Bump! Bump! Bump! Suddenly the world went black.

When she finally opened her eyes, she was being thrown around in a sack. Molly felt dizzy and confused. By the time she had stood up the letters were all tipped out of the sack onto a table. Molly was terrified and speechless. She hid behind an extra-large pile of letters. A couple of seconds later she was being bumped and tossed around. She peeped out and she saw a little window and outside the little window, all the trees, bushes and hedges were rushing past like they were all late for the train, which was when she realized that she was on a mail train! Suddenly she saw her small letter with a bright blue stamp on going into a different sack. She jumped into the sack with it. She peeped out of the top of the sack and saw the mail officers rushing up and down the carriages whilst the train chugged quickly along the old, rusty tracks. She knew they were old and rusty because the train was making a squeaking noise like a rat being captured by an eagle. Outside the little window the scene had changed to countryside and there were massive silky, brown cows dotted about on the sloping fields.



After what seemed like hours her letter got sorted into another sack. Then she figured out that the train had stopped moving because she had stopped being bumped around and she saw they were in a post man's bag. He chucked the bag in the van and drove away. A little while later, he took the post bag and a couple of other ones. Next, she realized that the postman was walking down the road holding his post bags and she recognized the street. It was the street her cousin lived on! She leapt out of the post bag with joy and ran across the pavement and up the drive and into the barn that her cousin lived in. When she reached the front door, the letter had already arrived there.

Five minutes later she and her cousin were sitting and enjoying the biggest meal in the world. It included two giant plates of jelly, one orange flavour, one banana flavour, a big plate of cucumber and salmon sandwiches and one gigantic chocolate cheesecake. Her cousin said she was the greatest adventurer in the world and that she had actually been on the last mail train in the UK.

Our area



Our Officers



Julia Singleton-Tasker
Lead CRP Officer
 Julia has worked for the CRP since January 2020 and is the lead officer for the CRP.



Sarah Davison
CRP Officer
 Sarah has worked for the CRP since June 2024 and leads on the Education stream of work.

Our Steering Group

The Heart of England CRP has core funding provided by the following organisations, who make up the foundation of our steering group:



The steering group is also supported by:



Thank you

Thank you to our steering group members for providing not only the financial support that enables us to deliver our projects, but also for the unwavering support of the CRP and its officers.



If you have been inspired by the work of the CRP and your organisation would like to get involved with ideas or as a supporter then please contact us.

CRP Contact Details:

HeartCRP@warwickshire.gov.uk
www.heartcommunityrail.org.uk

01926 412 085
@HeartCRP

