

THE MARLOW DONKEY



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The Marlow Donkey

The Magazine of the Marlow & District Railway Society

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The contents of the *Marlow Donkey* represent the views of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the position of the Society

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Front Cover Photographs

Top: 7903 Foremarke Hall at The Cotswold Festival of Steam 29 May 2016.

Photo: Tim Speechley. Article page 5.

Bottom: New sets 387130 and 387131 gaining mileage accumulation and acceptance test were caught passing Kings Langley on the West Coast main line. Photo: Peter Robins. Article page 4.

SOCIETY AND LOCAL NEWS

PREVIOUS MEETINGS

We have enjoyed two very different and highly entertaining meetings this summer.

For our annual joint meeting with the Maidenhead branch of the RCTS in June we were able to welcome the well-known and highly respected former BR manager Chris Green who spoke on the history of the Inter City sector and how its routes and operations have fared since privatisation. Chris was of course, the managing director of Inter City under BR and later held the same position with Virgin Trains. The meeting ended with a question and answer session in which many members participated.

The one disappointment of the evening was that our Vice-President Mark Hopwood was unable to join us to introduce Chris as planned after one of his drivers helpfully missed a red signal at Paddington and derailed his train!

July's meeting was at complete contrast. Dr David Turner presented a somewhat academic paper on Victorian and Edwardian Rail Travel. At times it did feel like we were in a university lecture and being one of the hottest evenings of the year so far didn't help concentration.

As usual, there was no meeting in August.

OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES

We have had two outdoor events this summer. On Sunday 29th May a party had a superb day attending the Cotswold Festival of Steam at the Gloucestershire - Warwickshire Railway. An illustrated report appears on the following pages.

On 7th August a sizeable number of members attended one of the year's open days at the late Ted Martin's 7¼" gauge Garden & Woodland Railway in Thame. Once again we were blessed with superb weather which made for a most enjoyable garden party atmosphere riding behind miniature GWR locomotives and enjoying the delicious home-made cakes provided as always by Mrs Martin. Below are two pictures taken at the event showing a train double-headed by a County and Dean Goods plus a view of the miniature shed with locos awaiting their turn.



ELECTRIFICATION PROGRESS

Work continues oh so slowly on the electrification of the Great Western Main Line. The first section to be "completed" was that between Tilehurst and Milton Junction, west of Didcot, with the main lines being energised in mid-July to allow testing of the new Hitachi Class 800 units to begin. This has been done largely during overnight weekend possessions and seems to be going to plan with the test sets, 800001/800002 regularly achieving 125mph.

Elsewhere, progress seems more patchy. Most effort is being put into completing the project as far as Maidenhead which will allow the line as far as there to be energised in April 2017 ready to allow Great Western to start electric services to Maidenhead in December 2017. Most of the structures on that section are now in place but there are substantial gaps still in the catenary.

Beyond Maidenhead to Twyford most of the masts have now been installed but once again there are curious gaps where one or more are missing. As a result the old favourite photo locations such as the bridges at Shottesbrooke, Milley Lane and Ruscombe Church have been lost.

At the time of writing, mid-August, the section from Twyford West to Kennet Bridge Junction has seen no activity apart from the driving of piles. It is rumoured that this is due to vociferous opposition from Sonning Parish Council who are demanding that a less obtrusive design of gantry is employed through Sonning Cutting and, apparently, have the support of a very well-known (now part-time) resident in this matter! Remember, a similar dispute occurred in the Goring area which delayed progress but eventually achieved nothing apart from some lighter structures on the Gatehampton and Moulsoford viaducts.

PHOTO OPPORTUNITIES

Many of you will be wondering where to get lineside pictures once the project is complete. This is occupying the minds of your Editor and Peter Robins and we are currently "exploring" possibilities. Once we come to a firm set of conclusions a photo-guide to the line will appear in the 'Donkey.

photos: Mike Walker





photo: Chris Waite



photo: Peter Robins

NEW TRAINS APPEAR

Although electrification work is far from complete, the new trains that will use it are starting to appear. On 30th June Great Western Railway ran a preview train for invited guests using 5-car Hitachi bi-mode 800004 turned out in GWR livery between Reading and Paddington. The date was chosen to mark the 175th anniversary of the completion of the Great Western main line and the guests started their journey at Bristol aboard one of the green HSTs. The picture, above left, shows the train passing Ruscombe Church under a leaden sky.

Barely a week later the first of the 45 Class 387s destined to work the London & Thames Valley services started mileage accumulation and acceptance test running on the West Coast main line (plus the odd trip to Brighton as they are DC equipped too) before being delivered to GWR. Sets 387130 and 387131 were caught passing Kings Langley, above right on one of these runs.

They have now been delivered to GWR and are being used on driver training runs out of Paddington to Hayes and Airport Junction ahead of entering public service between Paddington and Hayes from 5th September if all goes to plan. Pending the units being able to access Reading depot, which will be their home, under their own power, they are currently being operated out of Hitachi's North Pole IEP depot.

The planned GWR electric fleet has undergone several changes in recent months and can now be summarised as follows: The LTV fleet which was to consist of a mix of nearly new Class 387s from Thameslink along with eight new-build examples and a number of Class 365s from Great Northern, will now be a single all-new fleet of forty five 4-car Class 387s, numbered 387130-137 and 387307-343.

For the High Speed Services the Hitachi IEP fleet has undergone some changes too. Because of the delay in the electrification project all will now be bi-modal instead of a mix of bi-mode and all-electric units. Additionally a further seven 9-car Class 802 units have been ordered. The fleet will thus be:

800001 - 800036 5-car DfT procured
 800301 - 800309 9-car DfT procured
 802001 - 802022 5-car GWR procured
 802101 - 802114 9-car GWR procured

RCTS MAIDENHEAD MEETINGS

The Maidenhead RCTS branch resumes its meetings in September after its summer break. The autumn programme:

Mon 26 Sept 40 Years at BR Terence Jenner
 Mon 31 Oct The GWS Steam Railmotor Peter Jennings
 Mon 28 Nov Signals Stations & Structures R Warburton
 Mon 19 Dec Branch AGM and members' contributions

All meetings are held at the Cox Green Community Centre, Highfield Lane, Cox Green, Maidenhead, SL6 3AX starting at 19:30. MDRS members are always welcome.

AUTUMNAL STEAM

Perhaps it's tempting fate to mention them but a number of steam specials are booked through our area in the coming months and are listed here with the usual caveats.

Wed 7 Sept Victoria - Bristol 60163 Belmond Pullman
 Wed 7 Sept Tonbridge - Worcester 61306
 Thur 8 Sept Victoria - Bridgnorth 60163
 Sat 10 Sept Paddington - Shrewsbury 46201
 Sat 10 Sept Steam on the Met Met.1+L150
 Sun 11 Sept Steam on the Met Met.1+L150
 Sat 17 Sept Victoria - Newquay 46201
 Sat 17 Sept Paddington - Minehead loco TBA
 Tue 20 Sept Newquay - Victoria 46201
 Sat 24 Sept Banbury - Kingswear 34046
 Sun 25 Sept Paddington - Worcester 70013
 Wed 5 Oct Horsham - Gloucester 46201
 Thur 20 Oct Lewes - Bristol 46201
 Sat 26 Nov Paddington - Worcester 44871+45407
 Tue 29 Nov Victoria - Salisbury 34046
 Thur 1 Dec Victoria - Bristol 60163
 Sat 10 Dec Paddington - Bristol 46100
 Sat 17 Dec Paddington - Minehead 46201

Quite an eclectic list if they all come to fruition! As always updates, times and cancellations will be given in the weekly newsletters.

CONTRIBUTIONS

I've had a fair response to my recent appeals for contributions and have a small stock in hand for the next issue but, as always, I could still do with more so, please, don't leave it to the other guy! Thanks!

COTSWOLD FESTIVAL OF STEAM

The Gloucestershire - Warwickshire Railway held its now annual Cotswold Festival of Steam gala over the late spring bank holiday weekend at the end of May with a group of Marlow & District Railway Society members attending on the Sunday, 29th May.

The theme of the gala was to celebrate 175 years since the first locomotive was built at Swindon so, with one exception, all the locos taking part were built there.

We were fortunate to be blessed with a superbly sunny day and as is usual at these events an intensive service was run.

Here are a selection of members' photographs of the event.



Mike Walker

The star of the show was the only non-Swindon product. Merchant Navy 35006 *Peninsular & Oriental S N Co.* was making its debut after a 20-year restoration project and here rolls into Winchcombe with the 12:20 Cheltenham Racecourse to Toddington.

Also taking the limelight was 7903 *Foremarke Hall* which was making its first appearance back in service after a heavy overhaul. The condition can only be described as pristine as it basks in the sun at Toddington awaiting its next turn.

Tim Speechley

Mike Walker



7812 *Erlestoke Manor* from the SVR threads Dixon Cutting with the 15:30 Toddington to Cheltenham Racecourse goods.

Burrell *Diamond Queen* was one of two road engines displayed at Toddington.

Dave Woodhead



The Great Central supplied Ivatt 2MT 46521 which despite being an LMS design, was built at Swindon. Freshly painted in BR lined green, it sits at Winchcombe working a Toddington-bound goods. Home-based 7820 *Dinmore Manor* is in the bay giving footplate visits.



Tim Speechley

This 1960 Morris Commercial LC5 1½ ton light truck in BR livery was on display at Toddington.



Dave Woodhead



Tim Speechley

The associated North Gloucestershire Narrow Gauge Railway at Toddington was in operation using Polish 0-6-0T *Tourska*. The 2' gauge loco was built in 1957 by Chrzanow.

As the day drew to a close, 4277, another G-WR resident, departs from Toddington returning the goods train to its Winchcombe base for storage.

It was a most enjoyable day.



Mike Walker

RETURN TO MOUNTAIN ASH

Peter Robins reflects on changes in a Welsh valley



My first photographic encounter with real steam was on 17th February 1975 when I joined a group of four and headed west to sample some NCB steam. We started the day at Brynlliw colliery near Gorseinon followed by the Pontardulais system. We then spent the afternoon at what I thought was the best of the three at Mountain Ash. No.1 (Hudswell Clark 1885 of 1955) is seen here shunting wagons over the weighbridge. The former platforms of the GWR station and the NCB loco shed with *Llantarnam Abbey* (Barclay 2074 of 1939) inside can also be seen. The view is from the road bridge which crossed the former Taff Vale line to Aberdare which is still open, Afon Cynon the NCB line to Deep Dyffryn colliery, and the former GWR line used by the NCB to access Aberaman coking plant.

Below, from the same position but some forty years later on 3rd June 2016, all traces of the railway have been removed and the area has been landscaped. The River Cynon is now a bit wider and the former railway route is now a cycle path.



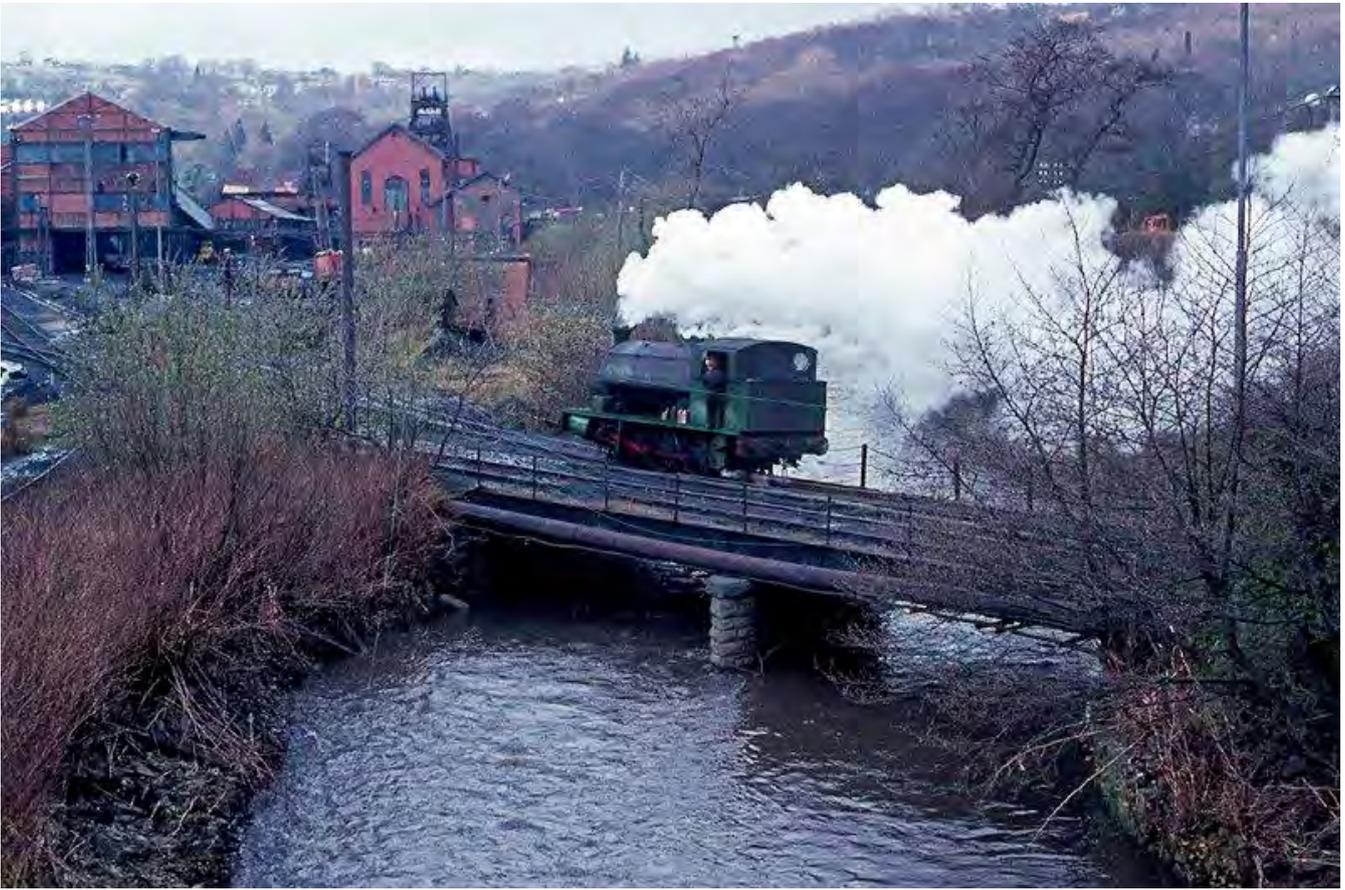


Having whetted my appetite, we made a second visit on 14th April 1975. After a quick call at Blaenavon, now Big Pit, we went straight to Mountain Ash where there was a lot more activity. After a busy morning, the activity stopped. No 1 sat brewing up and we waited patiently just away from the road bridge for the best part of an hour. Suddenly and without any warning, No.1 exploded into life and barked its way up the bank towards Aberaman coking plant. It was producing the most almighty

drumming noise from the firebox and was obviously getting a good thrashing.

From what I think was the exact same spot, there is a more peaceful and serene view. The railway has gone and been replaced by a cycleway. The brick built ladies loo and bus shelter have gone and the foliage has been allowed to grow unhindered. The town hall built in 1904 is just visible in the trees.





Seen from the bridge, No.1 crosses the River Cynon and heads for deep Dyffryn Colliery. The colliery was sunk in 1850 and closed in September 1979. During the 1970's the colliery was producing 160,000 tons of coal per year. The site of the colliery is now the Cynon Valley Indoor Bowls Centre and there is a small memorial to the colliery nearby. According to records, the photo below was taken three

days after closure of Deep Dyffryn colliery, on 24th September 1979. No.8 (RSH 7139 of 1944) heads a train of wagons from the colliery under the road bridge. Both No.8 and *Lantarnam Abbey* have been preserved at the Big Pit at Blaenavon. No.1 has been cosmetically restored and currently masquerades as the *Pilling Pig* in Lancashire. Its worksplate however is now closer to Marlow than South Wales.



Photographing 'The Night Riviera' at Penzance

Tim Edmonds



A week in Cornwall at the end of June gave me the rare opportunity to get some pictures of *The Night Riviera*, the GWR sleeper service between Paddington and Penzance. This is a train that is not often photographed – with good reason. In the summer 2016 timetable the up service departed Penzance 21:45 Monday to Friday and arrived Paddington 05:23 Tuesday to Friday and 05:12 Saturday. Sunday departure was 21:15, arriving Monday 05:03. Down trains departed Paddington 23:45 Monday to Friday, and arrived Penzance 07:53 Tuesday to Saturday. Sunday departure was 21:50, arriving on Monday at 08:59. The empty stock is stabled at Long Rock depot during the day and returned to the station about an hour and a half before departure time.

The best chances of seeing the train in daylight are likely to be at the Penzance end in summer and, since we had a holiday apartment in the town less than 15 minutes walk from the station, I hoped to be able to get a few shots. However, this was not as easy as it might seem, since there were a number of photographic 'challenges' to overcome. First was the weather, with rain forecast for much of the week. As it turned out we got a bit of sunshine, but rarely at the best times. Second was the direction of the light and the configuration of Penzance station and its approaches.

In the evening gloom under the wall at Penzance, 57604 Pendennis Castle waits at Platform 1 as passengers board The Night Riviera. The 'Voyager' in Platform 3 has arrived on the 09:00 XC service from Glasgow Central via Edinburgh, Leeds, Sheffield and Birmingham. 27th June 2016.



08410 waits at the end of Platform 1 after bringing the stock for the up sleeper from Long Rock into Penzance station. It carries the new green livery, but with a minuscule GWR logo.



The cast number and nameplates and on Pendennis Castle. Note the GWR red route availability and D power classification.

In spite of Real Time Trains showing the sleeper using platform 4 at Penzance, it consistently used platform 1 when I saw it. This is right below a high wall, so when the sleeper is there in the evening it is in shadow. I photographed the train awaiting departure from above the wall and from the platform on two occasions. On Monday the loco was 57604 *Pendennis Castle* in lined green livery with original Great Western Railway crest. On Tuesday it was 57603 *Tintagel Castle* in the new GWR green. The stock on both occasions was a mixture of the old First Great Western and the new GWR livery.

The main line approach to the station is single track from Marazion, using the former down line, while the old up line is used for empty stock working to and from Long Rock. From Penzance to Marazion there is a railway-owned footpath on the strip of land between the railway and the sea. This is open to the public, but is not the most attractive of walks at the Penzance end. It has views of the railway for most of its length, although unfortunately the first part is fenced too high for photography. I was walking along this section on the Monday evening and unable to get a shot of Long Rock's shunter, 08410, bringing in the ecs with the 57 at the other end. Murphy's law applied, and on future occasions the stock was propelled in by the class 57 without the shunter...

The best photographic viewpoint turned out to be the footbridge at Ponsandane, just short of Long Rock depot, from where you can get pictures in both directions. A shot of an approaching train with St Michael's Mount in the background is possible, and is best in the evening sunshine, but to exclude the lineside clutter in the foreground on the up side you have to crop out much of the train – and you still get the remaining brickwork of the old signal box on the down side. In brilliant sunshine on Tuesday evening I got a decent shot of the entire 17:55 local from Plymouth arriving, without the clutter since it was obligingly formed of a single-unit class 153. I had gone there expecting to get the 08 on the sleeper ecs, only to be greeted by the loco-less back of the train. Never mind, a 'going away' shot of the 57 was possible and gave me my only picture of the sleeper in sunshine. I returned on Thursday morning, which seemed to offer the best opportunity for photographing the down arrival – it was dry with patchy sunshine. On this occasion I decided to forget about St Michael's Mount and tele-zoomed to include a lineside palm tree and exclude the foreground rubbish. 57603 duly obliged by arriving a couple of minutes early in a glimmer of watery sunshine.



153318 arriving with the 17:55 Plymouth-Penzance with St Michael's Mount in the background and the brick base of Ponsandane signal box on the right. 28th June 2016.



Sleeper stock in the sunshine, as 57603 Tintagel Castle propels its train from Long Rock to Penzance station on the same evening.



57603 in Platform 1 at Penzance, displaying the new GWR logo and Tintagel Castle nameplate.



The evening shadows loom as 153318 departs from Platform 3 with the 20:18 to Plymouth, while 57603 Tintagel Castle waits in Platform 1 with The Night Riviera 21:45 to Paddington. 28th June 2016.

With Long Rock depot in the left background and Marazion on the right, 57603 Tintagel Castle approaches Penzance with The Night Riviera, the 23:45 from Paddington. 30th June 2016.



Great Western Railway Night Riviera/Koskador Ruvyer an Nos Hyns Horn Meur a'n West

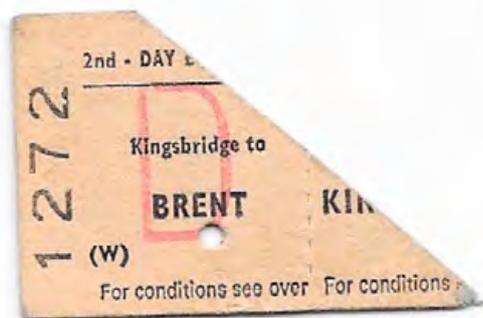
Some Lines on the Western

Story & pictures by John Sears

Over half a century ago.....53 years ago this August. 53 years before then would take things back to 1910. So, indeed, a long time. It's Saturday, 17th. of August, 1963 and the Kingsbridge branch has less than a month left of its useful life linking the main town of the South Hams to the Western's Plymouth main line at Brent. Halfway through a fortnight's family holiday in Paignton I'd been granted leave to explore further west. I've long since forgotten how I planned the day's journeys, but in those far-off times it was a trip behind double-headed hydraulics, a Hymek and a Warship, to Plymouth, then by DMU over Mr. Brunel's bridge to Saltash. The over-bearing road bridge upstream had opened about 15 months earlier, and the local service to Saltash was starting to hurt.

Hero and icon duly worshipped, it was back to Plymouth. My train thence to Brent was formed by one of the new Swindon-built Inter-City DMUs, Mk I coaches with under-floor engines and stylish wrap-around cab windows. It might have been new, but it didn't manage to climb Hemerdon any faster than the average 4-6-0.

The rationalisation that the Western pursued later with a zealotry that should have been recognised by a naming - *Western Zealot* has quite a ring to it - had doubtless been conceived, but was not yet born. The booking office at Brent was still open, even though it was after 16.00 - no early turn only opening - and the clerk sold me a half day return to Kingsbridge for 1/11. He was peeved with me for causing him to make change. I can't remember now what I gave him; could have been a ten-bob note, my change depleted after buying a half cheap day return from Plymouth to Saltash - 8d.!



Brent to Kingsbridge half day return, fare 1/11d

The winter 1963/4 Western Region timetable was "Stepping up the pace" according to the page 3 preamble. Lots of acceleration on the route to South Wales, with 2,700 h.p. diesel giants - Westerns to those asleep at the back - available to reduce journey times by an average of forty minutes. No more Hymeks visibly shaking with the effort of dragging twelve-car trains along the billiard-table. The sixth paragraph finally got round to the bad news part of the story - the only through trains west of Swansea would be the Fishguard boat trains. However, multiple diesel trains (sic) would connect with "nearly all mainline expresses" - after all, they'd been "specially timed". Meanwhile the London and Birmingham services had become the "fastest on the Region", but elsewhere woe was coming.....



Petrockstow. A Class 25 on some clay hoods. Looking north from the level crossing at the station, which had a loop, two platforms and two goods sidings. September 1978. In 1936 it had booked 1,417 passengers, and 1,229 had their tickets collected - about four every day.

Table 93a in the winter timetable was HALWILL, HATHERLEIGH and TORRINGTON, two through trains daily, thrashing the tracks at an end-to-end average speed of 15 mph, plus an early morning Torrington to Dunsbear trip, which returned from Petrockstow, and a 16.37 SX from Petrockstow back to Torrington. My soul for a trip on that line! It didn't open until July 1925 and even with only a single coach must have always provided almost as many seat miles as there are people in that empty part of England. I found a Class 25 pottering about at Petrockstow on outbound clay hoods in 1978, and actually managed to reach Meeth by rail in the Atlantic Coast Express IV on the 12th. of April 1980.

Kingsbridge (for Salcombe) was table 93b, which announced RAIL SERVICE WITHDRAWN as the closure should have been on the last day of the summer timetable. Bus licensing was running a week late, and the final week's arrangements duly appeared on 27th. of August in Plymouth Division Passenger Train Notice No. 361. The timetable day started with a 5.30 Newton Abbot to Plymouth, which called at Totnes and Brent. The set then returned to Brent and continued to Kingsbridge. There were six return trips on the branch, with the first from Kingsbridge, at 8.00, running through to Totnes, with a 25-minute wait for the up "Mayflower", due Paddington at 13.20. The fourth train, the 14.05, also ran to Totnes, providing there a 15 minute same-platform connection into the up *Royal Duchy*; Paddington by 19.25. The very first timetable for the line also had its first train from Kingsbridge at 8 o'clock, but only five trains a day rather than six, with journey times typically 40 minutes rather than 30 minutes.

The set returned empty to Brent in the morning after its escape to Totnes; the afternoon trip spent 80 minutes there before returning as a passenger train to Brent. 16.15 off Totnes, it was due into Brent at 16.30 but not out again until 17.15. It connected out of the 9.05 from Liverpool Lime Street to Plymouth ("buffet and restaurant cars")

which was due at 17.09, and with the 16.45 Plymouth to Newton Abbot, due Brent at 17.10. But why did it leave Totnes at 16.15? The previous down arrival there was at 13.10, so no connection – was it for school traffic? The last up train was the 19.20 from Kingsbridge, which connected for Plymouth, and, after a twenty-minute stop at Brent, ran through to Newton.

Six years earlier the 1957/8 timetable had offered more trains, with the days' service originating at Kingsbridge. There were seven trains thence SX, and but eight back from Brent. On Saturdays there were eight up trains, with a 12.20 filling the gap from 11.00 to 14.10. It crossed the 12.24 from Brent at Gara Bridge, other trains which crossed there were those at 14.10 from Kingsbridge and Brent, and, until 12th. October, those at 16.15 from both stations and a final pair, the 17.15 Kingsbridge and the 17.20 Brent. Two train sets and a passing loop to operate a maximum of sixteen trains a day. Staff and infrastructure costs have changed a bit over the decades. All trains were all-stations, except the 18.05 from Kingsbridge, which from mid-October onwards ran express through Loddiswell (Lodeswell) and Avonwick – well, at the line limit of 35, one hopes. But why did that one train miss those stations? Were the three minutes saved necessary to allow the loco to run-round at Brent and meet some legal requirement to depart at 18.45? The train connected with up and down trains, both due at 18.40. Up was the 18.07 Plymouth (North Rd.) to Bristol (Temple Meads), and down the 17.15 Exeter St. David's to Plymouth (North Rd.).

The railway had been a long time coming to Kingsbridge. The first serious thoughts were in 1854, although apparently when selecting its route the South Devon Railway had been tempted by a more circuitous, but probably only slightly less hilly, route between Newton Abbot and Plymouth that would have taken it via Torquay, Dartmouth and Kingsbridge. Parliament approved plans in the early 1860s for a line from Brent, and construction actually started to build a bridge over the Avon. However, time passed and confidence ebbed away. By 1874 a few miles of formation had been fenced, some construction begun but in what seems to have been a very piecemeal fashion, and eight chains of cutting ten feet deep was about all that was complete. In 1882 another act was passed, this time for the Kingsbridge and Salcombe Railway, and again from a junction at Brent. Three years later nothing concrete had happened, and the Great Western, who'd had the usual approaches from the smaller company for financial and operational support, instead of giving up, or losing out to the Midland, decided to accept the Kingsbridge company's offer and took over the "undertaking". Glaciers came and went, and by 1888 the GWR was in control and started mobilising for construction. Even so, it was over two years before work finally started in January, 1891. All involved appeared to be exhausted; 1893 had come and almost gone before the line, of 12½ miles and with four stations, was opened on Tuesday 19th. December.

The Great Western provided 1,000 free tickets – none for children though – for the first day, as well as sending its general manager and three directors and sundry local managers along to travel on the second down train. Local vicars showed their enthusiasm and some local children had a free tea and a day free of school. Kingsbridge just

www.mdrs.org.uk

beat Totnes at rugby, people processed through town and fireworks added to the celebrations. Eight days later work began to widen the approach road to the station, a remarkably prompt response to at least one item on the snagging list. Within a year, the GW coughed up £5,000 for more sidings at Kingsbridge. Within two months of opening the station master at Avonwick had earned his pay by calling in workmen to restore the railway after a section of cutting slumped onto the line. Work was fast – it was done with only one return trip cancelled.

Thirty years in the coming, it was about 18 months in the going; the line didn't quite enjoy its biblical span of three score years and ten. Closure was formally posted in March 1962, the South West Transport Users Consultative Committee held a public enquiry that November, and BR said the wages bill – all of £22,408!! – was over £6,000 more than the line's revenue. The traffic statistics quoted in *The Kingsbridge Branch* (the book) by Ken Williams and Dermot Reynolds (OPC, 1977) are frustratingly inexact and oddly presented – "passengers booked" figures for the three intermediate stations are lumped into five-year periods for some reason – but show how small the numbers of passengers were, and how large the numbers of staff. In 1957 there were nine clerical and 17 wages staff "authorised" to be on the books at Kingsbridge. They booked about 52 passengers a day, so an average of fewer than seven a train, but about eight parcels per train outbound and about 20 parcels on each arrival. The goods traffic totalled a bit over 40 tons per day. Back in 1935 there were seven fewer staff, similar patronage, slightly fewer parcels, but about 50% more tons of freight. At Gara Bridge each day saw about ten originating passengers, so, on average, every other train was boarded one passenger whose journey began there at Gara Bridge.

No wonder the booking clerks, early and late, at Kingsbridge booked up after each train left – they needed something to do. And to think I found Windsor Central late turn a bore. In the late 50s Mr. Cox the station master had a chief goods clerk, three other clerks, three booking/parcels clerks, six porters, two train crews plus a night loco man – and others besides! Out on the line were two five-man p way gangs. Anyone care to calculate how much all that lot would cost today? Of course, there had been some economies over the years, with the goods office at Brent closing, and Avonwick and Loddiswell becoming unstaffed. Outward signs were that the railway of 1963 was operating in the same way as it always had, except for diesel in its cylinders, rather than steam. Gloucester single cars had taken over from small Prairies in 1961, and the freight was hauled by D63XX locos from North British. Steam had a last laugh in the line's final week. On the Tuesday (10th. September) 4555 was motive power for a four-car dining special booked by a private individual from Thurlestone, a village on the coast a couple of miles east of Bigbury-on-Sea. The four cars, which included a kitchen car, had arrived on the day's *Cornishman* from Sheffield. One presumes it was a bit of clever diagramming, using the cars detached at Plymouth. The fare, including a three course turkey dinner, was £2.50, and the "noshex" was a huge success, with far too much alcohol drunk, massively-late running, and according to reports in the book, an additional passenger. The special was delayed at the level crossing at Topsham (about 1½ miles south of Gara

Gara Bridge. Looking back towards the station, the view out of the rear vestibule of the second of the four carriages on the train. Fully signalled, loop still in use though not required for crossing any trains, box at the up end of the up platform by the level crossing. Deep in the bosky valley of yet another River Avon. Mrs. Lavender and her eight children used this station and complained at the closure inquiry in November 1962 that they would have to move. They did, and went to Totnes.



Bridge) after the chord was pulled and a curious motorist - "steam-hauled dining train?", or thoughts to that effect, had got him out of his car - was invited aboard for a drink and was still aboard when the train left for Kingsbridge. Three hours later he was returned to his car, which he'd left with its engine running and the driver's door open. The timetabled service had already finished for the day, luckily for the PPM figures.

It's back to Brent, that August Saturday, to join the through carriages in the branch platform on the down side of the station. D6335 stands at the east end of four maroon vehicles, which had been detached from the rear of the 12.30 from Paddington in a move that I missed, but was presumably carried out while I was booking my ticket. My memory is that they were 57 foot LMS style coaches. I didn't note how many passengers were aboard, or what business it did at the intermediate stops, but I easily found an empty compartment. The branch headed straight ahead for a few hundred yards out of the east end of Brent station before curving right, all the while descending steeply. It was just over two miles to Avonwick and the gradients included three stretches of 1 in 60 and two at 1 in 50. Presumably the local topography precluded a station actually at Avonwick. It was half a mile away, alongside the road down the valley, its single platform on the down side and preceded by the goods siding, arranged as a loop with short spurs at each end. All three intermediate stations had only a goods store on the platform, not a full goods shed. Each station was stone-built, single-storey, with canopies. All the station buildings survive today as houses, together with their canopies.

Now the line had dropped down into the river valley its gradients eased; in the three miles to Gara Bridge there were three short lengths of level track, and no grade steeper than 1 in 100. This Avon (the word means simply "river") rises on Dartmoor and although here its valley heads almost directly southwards, the river meanders. Even though the line meandered too, it still had to cross the Avon ten times. The valley is around 300 feet deep, and its steep sides are heavily wooded. The scenery is a near-copy of that on another north-south branch, that to Looe.

Gara Bridge station was a crossing point, with platforms on both lines, and a level crossing at the up end, all controlled by a signal box sited on the up platform. The goods facilities had the same arrangement as at Avonwick, off the down side, but south of the station. Despite being the main intermediate station there was no village or even hamlet nearby; the station master's house was one of the few houses. No doubt its being near the line's mid-point and the five local roads which converged on the bridge over the Avon had chosen the site. Relaxing deep in the countryside, the station was the archetype of Great Western branchdom: attractive stone buildings, station gardens, roses against the signal box, conifers on the platforms.

Three and a quarter miles later came Loddiswell, again a single platform, and preceded by a goods yard with loop with short spurs at each end, on the down side. The village of Loddiswell lies a bit over half an uphill mile away to the west on the other side of the river. It's the largest village along the branch's route; its 2011 population is recorded as 777 (Kingsbridge has 6,116 inhabitants). After Loddiswell the railway left the Avon and turned left, climbing at 1 in 50 for a mile to Sorley Tunnel. There was a summit at the mid-point of the 625 yard-long tunnel, from which the line descended, at 1 in 990 whilst in the tunnel, and then much more steeply for a mile and a half. The first half of that distance was at 1 in 50, the second at 1 in 60. The approach to Kingsbridge took the railway on a left-hand curve through 90 degrees, to end facing south-east, a few hundred feet from the town centre and the quays. Kingsbridge is the birthplace of William Cookworthy, of china clay fame.

The spacious layout at Kingsbridge followed that curve, and by 1924 provided a platform that accommodated about six carriages, a loco shed off the bay platform road, a curved two-car carriage shed, its corrugated iron painted a fetching tar-black, and four goods sidings with a goods shed on a short loop, and a cattle dock. The station building had a full supply of offices - parcels, left-luggage, booking, enquiries and "advanced bookings". Holiday traffic was heavy, hence the through service for Paddington, and there was even a railway office at Salcombe. The

Kingsbridge 1. The station retains the full panoply of the Railway in its pomp: water crane at platform end, signal box, signals, goods shed, freight. Note especially the corrugated iron carriage shed, the gas lamp, the state of the paint-work. Just visible under the canopy at the far end of the building is a van stabled at the end of the bay.



goods shed is still standing, deep in the commercial park that the goods yard became, but the station building was demolished, though not until 2009, to local protest.

Frustratingly, the note-taking on my trip was practically non-existent. Not only did I not record the locos on the journey to Plymouth, or the DMUs I used to Saltash and Brent, but I didn't note the times of the trains I used on the main line from and to Paignton. However, as well as noting D6335, I also recorded W55001 and W55014 coupled together at Brent waiting to resume the service after the loco took its train off the branch.

They were stabled in the loop, which meant that when running-round the 18.00 Kingsbridge to Newton Abbot during its reversal at Brent, D6335 ran through the goods shed, also on a loop. But nothing else was written down - no train running, or details of patronage. My Brownie managed to record some scenes on the day, with a couple more added a few days later on a road trip, to help prompt memories of what I have just realised must have been my first "bash". My soul for a chance to go back. Oh! - already promised for that trip over the complete North Devon & Cornwall Junction Light Railway.....



Kingsbridge 2. The loco shed, with its off-centre door. Loading bank; there in the bay is the van, which was a regular feature. Signal box behind photographer. The houses line the road to Salcombe.

FROM THE ARCHIVES

KINGSBRIDGE REVISITED



Following on from John Sears' article, a selection of shots of the branch. 5533 leaves the picturesque junction station at Brent with the branch train to Kingsbridge. July 1957.

Keith R Pirt W15

4561 leads a Brent to Kingsbridge train out of Avonwick with a LNER 6-wheel brake leading a B Set coupled in reverse formation. April 1960.

Peter W Gray/Colour-Rail BRW263





GRCW single car W55000 arrives at Gara Bridge on a Brent to Kingsbridge run, the branch's life hangs by a thread. Unless a meet is scheduled, the lady on the up platform will have a long wait for its return. June 1963.

G H Hunt/Colour-Rail DE2039

With the terminus laid out like a model, small prairie 4561 waits at Kingsbridge with a single coach and van to form the 16:05 to Brent. March 1960.

Peter W Gray/Colour-Rail BRW471



Summertime Panniers



Both our local heritage railways have been using hired-in pannier tanks this summer. The Chinnor & Princes Risborough Railway had the South Devon's L92 (5786) seen passing Bledlow cricket ground (Above) on 24th July

The Cholsey & Wallingford used Llangollen's 6430 to mark the line's 150th anniversary. Below, it approaches Cholsey's Church Road bridge on 6th August.

Both photos: Mike Walker

