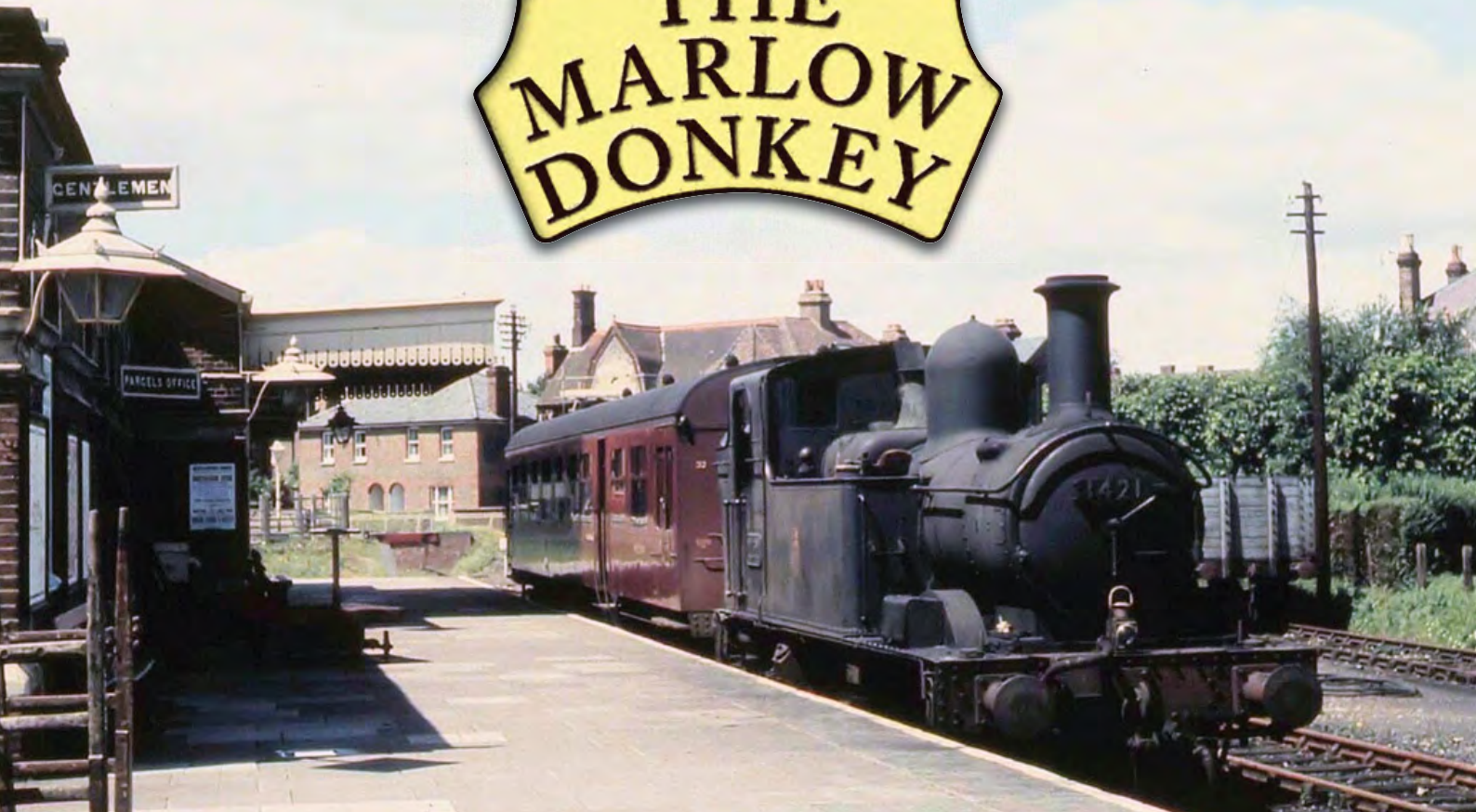


# THE MARLOW DONKEY



## 150 YEARS of THE MARLOW DONKEY



Edition

# 180

June 2023



**Contents:**  
The Railway Comes to Marlow  
The Stations: Marlow  
The Stations: Bourne End  
Services and Trains

# 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

## CONTENTS

TIMETABLE - Forthcoming meetings	Page 2
CHAIRMAN'S NOTES Mike Wilker	2
SOCIETY NEWS	3
NUNEHAM VIADUCT REBUILD	4
THE RAILWAY COMES TO MARLOW	5
THE STATIONS: MARLOW	7
THE STATIONS: BOURNE END	13
SERVICES AND TRAINS	17
ALONG THE WAY	21

### Front Cover Photographs

*Top: No. 1421 basks in the summer sun at Marlow 17 July 1960.*

*Photo/Copyright: Gerald T Robinson. Article page 7.*

*Bottom: 165121 at Bourne End forming the 14:39 Maidenhead to Marlow 1 February 2018.*

*Photo/Copyright: Mike Walker. Article page 13.*

# TIMETABLE

## FORTHCOMING MEETINGS

Meetings are held in the Bourne End Community Centre, Wakeman Rd, Bourne End at 7.15 for 7.30pm or can be attended on-line on Zoom (except September see page 3).

Thursday 15 June **150 YEARS OF THE MARLOW DONKEY** Mike Walker

Mike's presentation marks the sesquicentennial of the opening of the Great Marlow Railway. The presentation reviews the high and low points of the line's history along with a detailed look at the route and the trains that have formed The Marlow Donkey. Marlow's forgotten "other railway" and the competition will also be covered.

Thursday 20 July **THE EARLY DAYS OF THE WYCOMBE RAILWAY** David Lane

In a complimentary presentation, David covers the story of the building of the first section of the Wycombe Railway between Maidenhead and High Wycombe including some remarkable computer generated images of High Wycombe station as built, the result of many years of research by David.

Thursday 17 August **A TENTH COLOUR-RAIL JOURNEY** Paul Chancellor

Paul's presentation will cover the work of ten railway photographers. Some well known and others less so, are featured in his Tenth Colour-Rail Journey with scenes from the 1950's to the present day spread throughout the UK. The show illustrates their different photographic styles and approaches to getting that "master shot" and even how their interpretation of a view changed over the years.

Thursday 21 September **SRI LANKA: BROAD GAUGE TO GREAT WESTERN** Simon Colbeck

The railways of Sri Lanka. A wide ranging look at this beautiful island railway system. Featuring steam and heritage diesel traction from the last ten years and a fascinating selection of archive colour images of steam at work on the island in the 1960's and 1970's.

Please note, this programme will NOT be available on Zoom.

## CHAIRMAN'S NOTES

As I prepare these notes the weather finally seems to be perking up after what has been a miserable spring. Hopefully this will give a chance to get out and enjoy some action.

Once again the recent few months have been difficult for the rail industry. Just when we thought we'd seen the back of the damaging strikes they have come back with a vengeance and, locally, we have the disruption caused by the failure of Nuneham Viaduct closing the key main line between Didcot and Oxford for at least a couple of months despite the heroic efforts of Network Rail working 24/7 to restore the bridge. There must be days when our President thinks the whole world is conspiring against him! And, of course, it's not just the national network that is being disrupted. Many of our heritage railways are struggling with increased costs and falling attendances due to the cost of living crisis. Please do support them if you can. There is a real possibility of us losing one or more this year.

The committee has recently been looking at the future use of Zoom by the society. We are deeply concerned at the continuing poor attendances at the Bourne End Community Centre as many of those who live locally seem to prefer to stay at home and watch from their sofas. A healthy live audience is essential to create an atmosphere and to give feedback to the speaker. A question now often asked by potential speakers is: how big a live audience do we expect? Many travel long distances and are

becoming increasingly reluctant to do so to address a handful in the hall. As someone who gives talks, I can fully understand this.

Zoom was introduced as a method of keeping the society active during the pandemic, it was never intended as a long-term solution; that seems to have happened by default.

We are aware that stopping Zoom may be unpopular and create difficulties. We have seen a large rise in our associate membership in the past couple of years but studying the data shows that surprisingly few of these new members actually attend regularly on Zoom. Our real concern is for that very small number of members who live locally but can't get out for health or mobility reasons and those long-standing loyal members who have moved away (it was for them that associate membership was introduced) who have found Zoom to be an excellent way of re-engaging with society activities.

We are not alone in this dilemma. Many other such groups who took to Zoom have already switched back to live-only meetings and many more are considering it. We have not come to any firm decision as yet but we hope to do so before the new year.

Your thoughts would be welcome.

*Mike Walker*

# SOCIETY AND LOCAL NEWS

## NEW MEMBERS

We've had further new members join us in recent weeks: Neil Manthorpe from High Wycombe and Michael Patterson from Burton-upon-Trent. Welcome to you both.

## PREVIOUS MEETINGS

March saw our President, Mark Hopwood, Managing Director of GWR give us another of his regular updates on the company and the wider industry. Unfortunately, due to other commitments he was unable to join us live only by Zoom.

In April, Richard Crane returned to take us on a journey tracing the route of the *Master Cutler*. This famously used several over the years but Richard concentrated on the most well-known, from Sheffield to London Marylebone by way of the Great Central.

The life and times of Stanier 8F 48773 was the subject of a fascinating presentation by Jeff Ryan and Bill Northrup of the Stanier 8F Preservation Society for the May meeting. This seemingly humble freight locomotive has led an extraordinarily varied life serving not just the LMS and BR but also wartime service in Persia, Palestine and Egypt before repatriation.

## NO ZOOM IN SEPTEMBER

Two of our forthcoming speakers have expressed concerns over allowing their presentations to be broadcast on Zoom due to concerns that images may be downloaded and used elsewhere without permission, breaching copyright. Both have been victims in the past.

Whilst one has agreed to continue with Zoom, the other, Simon Colbeck in September, is adamant he will not do Zoom. Sadly we found this out too late to cancel and seek an alternative speaker for the meeting which therefore will be a live only meeting held in the Bourne End Community Centre.

This has sparked a wider debate within the committee about the whole future of holding meetings on Zoom. See Chairman's Notes on the preceding page.

## MALCOLM'S BOOKS

As most of you know we were asked by Malcolm Margetts' family to assist in finding new homes for his book collection. Thanks to a lot of work by Mike Hyde and Vincent Caldwell to catalogue them we were able to distribute a list to all members and then make them available at meetings, inviting donations to be made which we will pass on to the Parkinson's Disease Society, Malcolm sadly succumbed to this and another member is in the early stages.

So far we have raised over £75 and our thanks goes to all who have taken part.

Obviously, we can't go on for ever so we have decided that we will have them available for one last time at the June meeting after which we will donate them to local heritage railways for sale in their bookshops.

If you would like to bid therefore this is your final choice. Copies of the original list are available on request. The collection is heavily weighted towards things LMS and the north west plus trams which reflects Malcolm's interests. If not collecting in person, we ask you pay for postage.

## A SPECIAL EDITION

We make no apologies for devoting virtually all of this issue to our local branch line; after all, it's not every day you get to be 150 years old.

Sadly, this landmark is pretty low-key compared with what has gone before. Back in 1973 the centenary was famously celebrated with a steam day on the branch organised by the Marlow-Maidenhead Passengers' Association which was enormously successful despite almost constant rain. Didcot supplied 6106 and 6998 *Burton Agnes Hall* which topped-and-tailed some BR Mk1s between Bourne End and Maidenhead plus its two GWR Autotrailers to work the Bourne End to Marlow section. They were to have been accompanied by 1466 but that was failed during a BR inspection a few days before and was replaced by 1450 (a former '*Donkey loco*') which came up from South Devon under its own power and at BR's expense. Imagine that happening today!

Twenty-five years later celebrations were more muted but the MMPA put on a display at the decorated Bourne End station, the train carried a headboard all day (designed by our own John Tuck and made with the help of Julian Heard) and passengers were issued with specially printed souvenir tickets.



This time however things will be very low-key. The MMPA seems to be moribund and the current way the railway industry is micro-managed by the DfT means there is little scope for today's GWR to push the boat out to mark the occasion. At the time of writing, our President was still trying to arrange some suitable additions to local station signage to at least draw attention to the significance of 28th June.

Therefore, the real commemoration is in the form of this issue of the *Marlow Donkey* and our June meeting which we hope as many of you as possible will attend - preferably in person.

A question often asked is: Why the *Marlow Donkey*? The truth is nobody really knows. It was common for GWR branch trains to be given such local "pet" names but the origins are lost in time. In our case, it has been suggested that the name refers to the pack animals that preceded the coming of the railway whilst others suggest more colourful origins. What is possibly unique is that it continues in use to this day.

## DONKEY CONTRIBUTIONS

After a healthy supply of contributions over the past year or so, my stock of articles is now, once again, getting perilously low so the annual appeal goes out once more. Articles can be on anything rail related and cover any period. If you don't have suitable illustrations we can probably come up with something.

If you feel you can help please get in touch - details on page 1 - and we can discuss ideas.

## NUNEHAM VIADUCT COLLAPSE

Mid-morning on 3rd April Network Rail imposed an emergency closure of Nuneham Viaduct which carries the trunk Didcot to Oxford line across the River Thames between Culham and Radley. This was in response to serious settlement of the southern abutment which it was feared to be close to collapse.

The line is of strategic national importance, in addition to passenger services operated by GWR and Cross Country, it hosts around forty freights daily, mostly container trains connecting the midlands and north with Southampton docks and therefore the closure is leading to major problems.

The original structure when the line opened in 1844 was of timber construction. Timber was replaced by iron girders circa 1846/8 with steel decking installed in 1877. The present bridge was built by GWR in 1906/7 and consists of two spans each comprising three bowstring girders. The old south abutment (the one that has failed) was retained with some refurbishment and refacing. The northern viaduct approach spans were infilled in 1929 at which time the present north abutment was built.

The instability of the southern abutment has been a known problem which was being monitored for many years as it has been very gradually sinking into the clay of the river bank. This has been managed by lifting and packing but since late last year the movement has become more pronounced. This led to the imposition of a 50mph limit over the viaduct late last year and in February this was reduced to 20mph.

Things deteriorated rapidly at the start of April with the speed limit reduced to a mere 5mph. Network Rail had started remedial work by injecting a tough polymer grout into the base of the southern abutment to stabilise it but this proved futile. By early on the morning of Monday 3rd it is said that the movement could actually be seen and the decision was taken to shut the line on safety grounds. It is thought that the exceptionally wet weather in March - the area received around 350% of its average rainfall for the month - was a major contributory factor in the accelerated failure of the abutment.

Access to the site is not easy as it is somewhat remote from local roads. A ½ mile long temporary access road had already been constructed across fields to the site for the stabilisation works but this had to be upgraded to take the weight of the heavy plant now required.

After an initial delay whilst Network Rail and outside experts decided on what should be done, work has been progressing rapidly, 24/7. Pontoons were floated down river and positioned



*A track level view just after the closure showing how far the bridge and track had dropped.*

*Photo: Network Rail*

to allow piles to be driven into the river bed to carry a temporary structure to support the south span. These piles were actually the unused bases from the aborted Oxford electrification.

With the south span safely secured, the remains of the south abutment have been demolished and part of the approach embankment removed. This allows further piling to be carried out using interlocking steel plates driven 25m into the river bank to form a wall behind which a new south abutment will be built and the embankment reinstated.

It is hoped to complete the work and reopen the line by 10th June and at the time of writing (late May) things appear to be on schedule to achieve this.

In the meantime passenger services are being turned at Didcot and Oxford with a major programme of replacement buses linking the two, some non-stop others serving the intermediate stations; Appleford, Culham and Radley. There has also been a limited peak hour rail shuttle between Didcot and Culham and Oxford and Radley provided by GWR. Freight services have been diverted, most to the West Coast and Great Western Main Lines with a small number, mostly those serving the Oxford area diverted over the Chiltern Line.



*Work progressing well on 15th May as seen from the right bank towpath with piling in progress. Whilst the south span appears to be unsupported it is actually being held up by staging supported by the cylindrical piles.*

*The channel under the north span has remained open for river traffic throughout.*

*Photo: Brian Daniels*

# THE RAILWAY COMES TO MARLOW



*This well-known photograph is the earliest known image of the Marlow Donkey and shows GWR 517 class 0-4-2ST no.522 at Marlow station very soon after the opening.*

At the dawn of the railway age, Buckinghamshire was still largely a rural backwater and as a result the earliest railways passed it by. The London & Birmingham, opened in 1837, only passed through the eastern side of the county near Tring whilst the Great Western (1838) likewise only penetrated the extreme south-east corner from Iver to Taplow.

There were numerous proposals during the early 1840s to build lines through the county but apart from the Aylesbury Railway from Cheddington opened in 1839 and the first "branch line" in the county, none came to fruition. This caused some frustration in High Wycombe, which was already the principal town in the south of the county, so in 1845 local interests got together to form the Wycombe Railway Company to build a railway to connect the town with the Great Western at Maidenhead.

Despite quickly receiving parliamentary approval, construction of the WRC was a somewhat protracted affair involving the bankruptcy of the main contractor and various attempts to get the GWR to take over the project. Eventually the GWR did have to take on a more involved role but the WRC retained its independence although the line was leased to the GWR for operation after its opening on 1st August 1854. Whilst this first stage linked High Wycombe to Maidenhead subsequent extensions reached Thame in 1862, Aylesbury in 1863 and Kennington Junction (south of Oxford) in 1864. The WRC was fully absorbed by the GWR on 31st January 1867 and converted to standard gauge throughout in September 1870, although the Princes Risborough to Aylesbury branch had been converted in 1868 in connection with the GWR's working of the standard gauge Aylesbury & Buckingham Railway.

The arrival of the WRC had left Marlow in a similar position to that which had afflicted High Wycombe. The nearest point on the WRC was Marlow Road station in the village of Bourne End, some 3 miles away along very poor roads.

Again there were proposals that would have put Marlow on the railway map but which came to nothing. Perhaps the most fanciful of these was the Midland & Grand Junction proposal of 1845 for a line from Reading to Northampton which would come through Hurley before crossing the river and then go directly north from Marlow to High Wycombe. The promoters had clearly not studied the local topography!

The Wycombe Railway itself proposed a branch to Marlow in 1864 from Marlow Road (Bourne End) where there was to have been a triangular junction before following a course not dissimilar to that finally built. As part of the same proposal, the WRC proposed a line to Uxbridge Vine Street but, obviously, neither were built. Another equally unsuccessful attempt was made in 1866 despite strong backing from the GWR on this occasion.

Once more it was left to local people to take matters into their own hands and a meeting was held on 29th August 1867 at which inhabitants of the town discussed options for bringing the railway to Marlow. This resulted in the formation of The Great Marlow Railway Company - until 1897 the town was called Great Marlow. Well known local figures took prominent roles in the company including Colonel Owen Peel Wethered who took the chair and Peter Borgnis as Vice-Chairman.

Surprisingly the GWR initially objected to the proposal but was brought on side by certain assurances by the GMR and the Parliamentary bill for the construction of the line received the Royal Assent on 13th July 1868. Messrs. Lucas & Wilkinson were appointed as the contractors to build the line with Edwin Clark, a local man renowned for his engineering achievements, as consulting engineer.

Unlike the Wycombe Railway there were no major problems encountered during construction of the 2¾ mile long line which was largely level and ran along the flood plain on the north bank of the river for the whole route.

There was only one major engineering structure required and this was to bridge the stream flowing from the Abbotsbrook Estate near Bourne End into the River Thames. Known as the Marlow Viaduct (despite being in Bourne End and to distinguish it from the existing Bourne End Viaduct carrying the WRC over the Thames) this 50 yard structure was initially built of timber but was rebuilt in 1913 as a three-span steel structure with brick piers. at a cost of £3,237.

The site chosen for the terminal in Marlow was on the south east side of the town in what was at that time open fields at the bottom of today's Glade Road where it met Dedmere Road and what became Station Road connecting it to the High Street. It was provided with a goods shed and engine shed in addition to the main station building. It didn't take long for development to take place around the station with a Railway Hotel being established by 1875. This survives today as the *Marlow Donkey* public house although it no longer offers the weary traveller accommodation.

The first sod was cut by Mrs O. P. Wethered on 22nd November 1871 amid the usual celebrations of such events although, curiously, it seems Mrs Wethered was not presented with the commemorative silver salver until January 1873. The original contractors, Lucas & Wilkinson, appear to have dropped out and were replaced by Clark, Punchard & Co. who provided an estimate of £15,698 10s excluding the cost of providing the junction at Marlow Road which would be undertaken by the GWR with the GMR contributing £2,500 towards the cost of those works.

With the annual regatta looming on 28th June 1873 the company was anxious that the line be ready for the big day. Col. Wethered carried out his own inspection of the line on 17th June riding on GWR locomotive 522 which it appears remained on the line for some time after the opening. Colonel Yolland carried out the official inspection for the Board of Trade on 25th June using a "heavy goods engine" which had been selected to test the line. The GMR pulled out all the stops including providing the inspector with a very good lunch - something that might be misconstrued today! Col. Yolland was satisfied with the works subject to only a couple of very minor requirements and permitted the line to be brought into use.

No time was lost and The Great Marlow Railway was officially opened to the public on 27th June 1873 just in time for the regatta although it appears to have been a quiet affair without the usual civic celebrations that such events generated. The completed line cost about £23,500 and was operated by the GWR on behalf of the GMR from the outset.



*The seal of The Great Marlow Railway Company now in the collection of Steam, the GWR museum at Swindon.*

The initial service consisted of ten trains in each direction daily with a through carriage to Paddington being attached to the 10.10 am departure from Marlow returning on the 5 pm from Paddington. Marlovians quickly took to their new service and the *Reading Mercury* reported that on the evening of 12th July for example around 150 people packed themselves into the four carriage train. Goods services commenced from 5th July with, it is reported, 'close to 100 tons of goods' passing over the line between Wednesday 9th and Friday 11th July.

The station at Marlow Road was renamed Bourne End with effect from 1st January 1874 to avoid the inevitable confusion whilst 'Great' was dropped from the name of the terminal on 14th February 1899. The Great Western absorbed the Great Marlow

company on 1st July 1897 bringing to a close the era of semi-independence.

Within weeks of the takeover the GWR unveiled ambitious proposals to link Marlow with Henley which had been served by its own branch line from Twyford since 1857.

This would have run along the Berkshire side of the river for a distance of around 9 miles. Both the existing stations at Marlow and Henley would have been by-passed although possibly retained as goods stations. The proposed line would have deviated from the existing route near Marlow Point and today's rugby ground to cross the Thames in the vicinity of the present A404 Marlow by-pass bridge. It would then have passed behind Bisham village where there would have been a new station to serve Marlow before continuing west. Further stations were planned for Hurley, Mill End Hambleton (which would have required an access bridge over the river) and Remenham. A tunnel would then have taken the line through Remenham Hill avoiding the sharp bend of the river. Finally, having crossed the road by Henley Bridge there would have been a new Henley station before the line re-crossed the Thames to join the existing Henley branch in the vicinity of Mill Lane crossing. The line would have been double track and it was also proposed to double both the Marlow branch and the line between Maidenhead and Loudwater (The WRC had been built with provision for double track).

Sadly, the scheme met with fierce opposition from within Henley where there were objections based on the perceived detrimental effects on the famous regatta and along the route where there were worries about the effects of building embankments across the flood plains and the resultant risk of flooding for riverside communities.

The GWR made several attempts to address these concerns without success and therefore the project was quietly dropped.

### **Want to know more?**

The full story of the branch can be found in *The Marlow Branch* by Chris Turner and Paul Karau published by Wild Swan in 1987. Copies are still available; see:

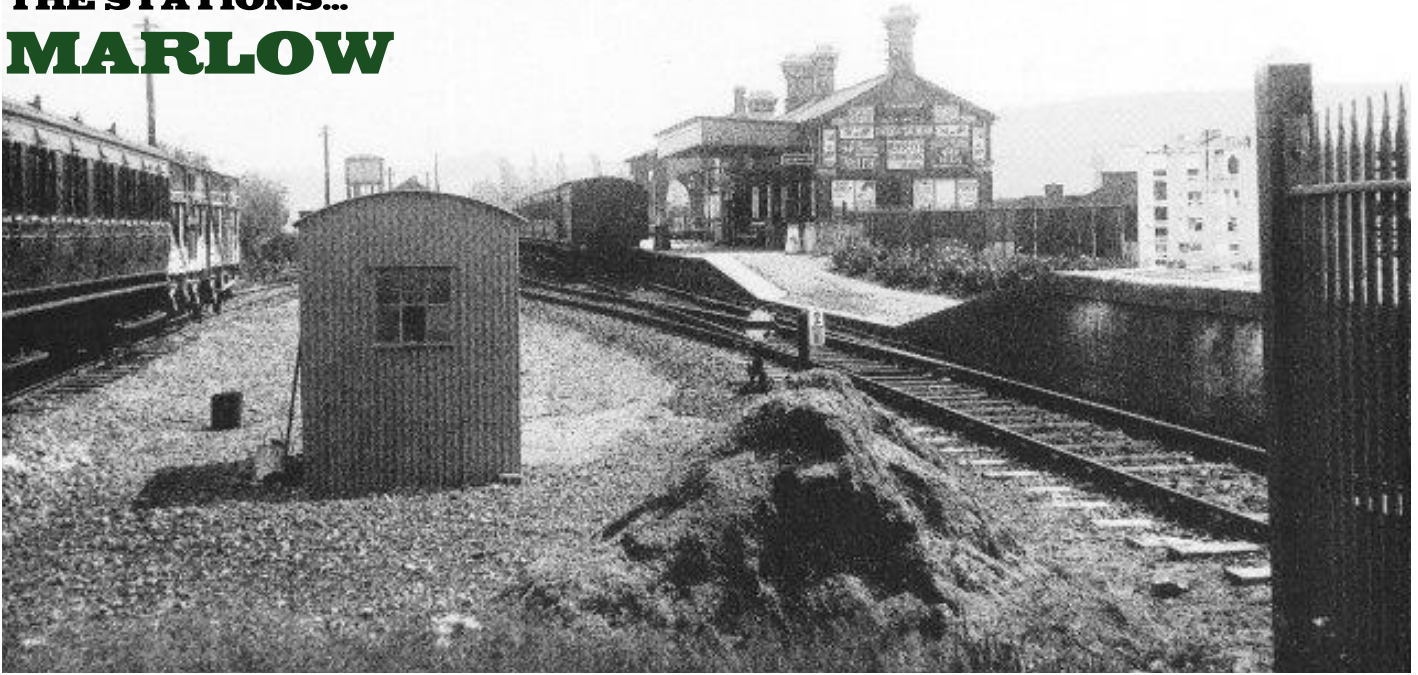
<https://wildswanbooks.co.uk/Books/Marlow-Branch.htm>

*Another early view of Marlow station taken around 1910 showing the four-wheeled coaches employed on the branch before the introduction of autotrains in the mid-1930s.*

*Photo: Lens of Sutton*



## THE STATIONS... MARLOW



*The station viewed from Dedmere Road around 1910 but little different from how it would have appeared originally apart from the carriage and cattle trucks on the left standing in 'Khartoum Siding' laid in 1901-2.*

L&GRP

Great Marlow station (as it was until 1899) was built amid open fields on the south-east corner of the town next to Dedmere Road and was initially provided with three main structures, the station building, an engine shed and a goods shed plus a small signal box. The layout was simple; the main line ran straight alongside the single platform and was provided with a run-round loop off which a siding fed the engine shed. The goods yard had just two sidings, one serving the goods shed and the other having an extension back towards Bourne End (see below).

Despite the GMR being nominally independent, the line and station had been constructed under the supervision of the GWR yet only the goods shed can be described as a typical GWR structure of the period.

The station building was of an unusual design for the GWR, the only other being an almost identical structure at Hungerford and some common design elements; the large, round topped windows and the unusual canopy valances incorporating round ended boards with holes rather than the usual dagger ends, were also used at Taplow. As all date from around the same time it is thought they are the work of the same architect.

Constructed in red brick with buff stone dressings, the building consisted of two distinct sections. That close to Dedmere Road had a gabled slate roof and contained (from the same end) a combined station master's and booking office, a combined booking hall and general waiting room and the ladies waiting room. Each of these had its own ornate chimney.

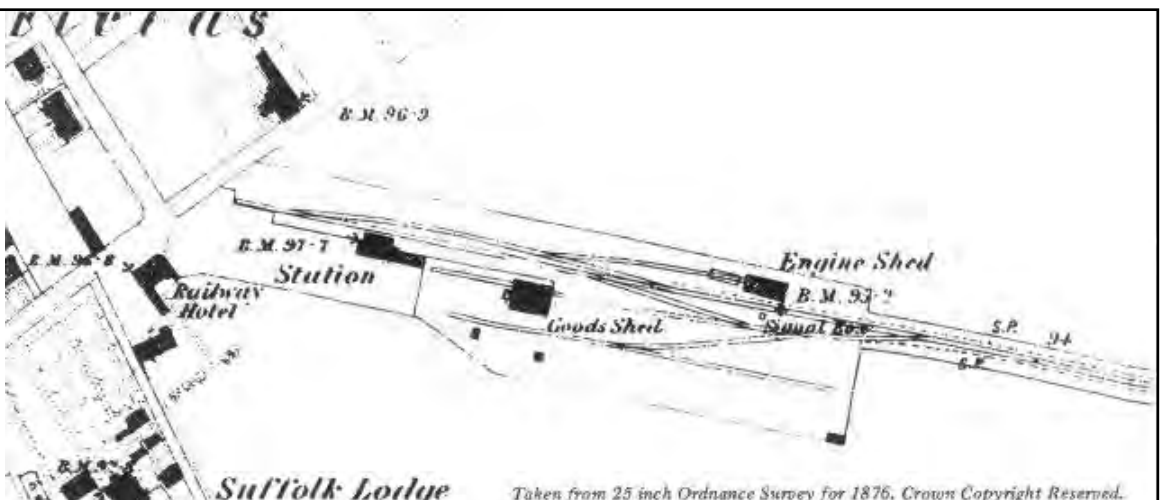
The second part of the building was slightly narrower on the platform side and from ground level appeared to have a flat roof but this was an illusion caused by a parapet hiding a very shallow gabled roof covered with lead sheeting. It contained a parcels office and accommodation for the porters.

The single road engine shed appears to have been a unique structure. Constructed in red brick with a gabled slate roof, it had three large, round topped, multi-pane windows on each side and was had a door only at the Marlow end above which was a wooden water tank. Internally there was an inspection pit whilst a small, timber coaling platform was provided outside.

As previously mentioned, the goods shed was of the typical GWR style of the period. Again of red brick with a slate roof it had openings at both ends for the siding to pass through with the walls above these being replaced by wooden boarding forming a semi-circular arch above the track. There were also two rectangular windows in the south end wall and a small lean-to office at the station end. There were two pairs of sliding doors provided in the west wall which opened to reveal recesses in the internal goods platform which allowed carts to be backed in for loading or unloading. There was also a 2-ton capacity gallows-style crane.

This extract from the 1876 Ordnance Survey shows the station as it was built. Note the short platform and the "kick back" siding in the yard which must have been a challenge to shunt.

The lack of any development around the station is also noteworthy - Lock Road was for the future.





This view taken during the serious floods of 1894 shows the engine shed on the left along with the original signal box in the centre. The 517 class locomotive and carriage are standing on the curious stub of the original goods yard access line left after the yard alterations carried out a little earlier.

Klaus Marx

There were some alterations to the layout of the goods yard probably early in the 1890s although the exact date is unknown. These can be seen in the diagram below but the main change was move the entrance points to the yard some distance towards Bourne End. This eliminated the former “kick-back” section of the back siding and must have greatly simplified shunting operations. An additional siding was laid alongside the goods shed and cut into the platform. The purpose of this is unclear as it was too short to be of any use as a bay and was more likely just for storage. Curiously, part of the original access connection to the back siding was retained as a stub (see the photo above) which, it appears, was not even provided with a buffer stop.

Also by this time a cattle market had been established opposite the station approach on the site today occupied by the Royal British Legion hall and car park. To serve this a cattle dock was provided at the extreme end of the line. This was alongside the headshunt for the run round loop which must have been interesting if cattle were being handled when it was wanted to run a loco round a passenger train - push-pull operation didn't start until the 1930s.

Even allowing for these alterations, the layout of the station presented some operational challenges at peak times, particularly during the annual regatta. Therefore, soon after the GWR took full control of the GMR in 1897 plans were drawn up for a number of alterations and improvements which were authorised in March 1901. These included a substantial extension to the length of the main platform and the run-round loop to allow longer trains to be handled along with a short bay for special trains. This latter was an adaption of the previously mentioned siding alongside the goods shed although it was cut back to end at the Bourne End end of the goods shed. Curiously, despite being described as being for special passenger trains, there is no evidence this bay was ever signalled to passenger standards.

Two additional sidings were provided, one alongside the existing back siding and the other off the loop up to Dedmere



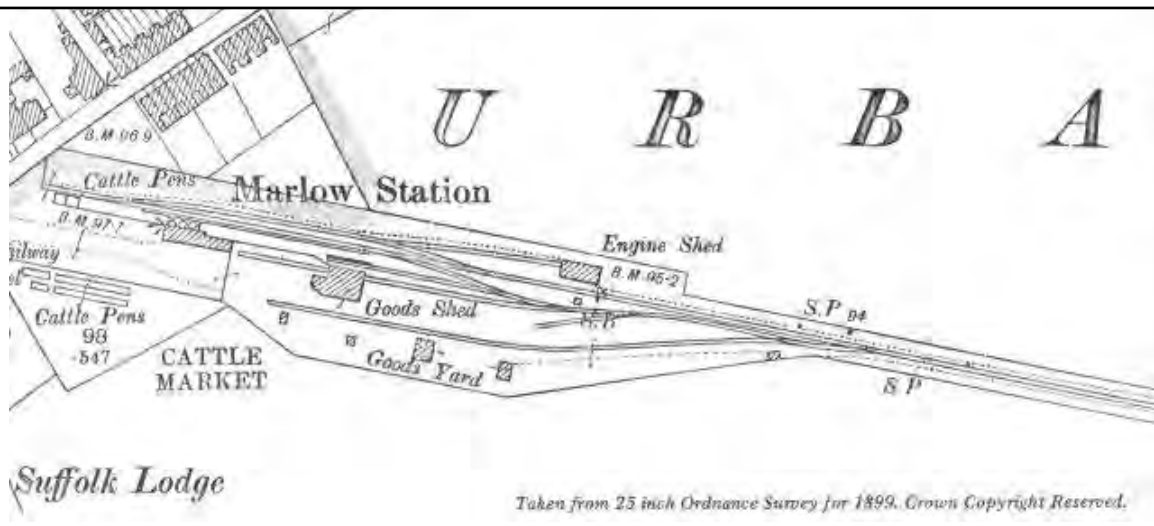
Road which was locally called “Khartoum Siding”. It was used to stable additional passenger vehicles, loco coal wagons and gas tank wagons used to charge the lighting tanks of the passenger vehicles - electric lighting didn't feature on the ‘Donkey’ until well into the 1950s. In addition, despite there being a coaling platform at the shed, it was not uncommon for the loco to back into Khartoum and buffer up to the coal wagon. That way it could be coaled by only moving the coal once, direct from wagon to bunker, rather than twice; wagon to platform then to bunker, and it cut out some shunting too.

The main station building was also extended at the Bourne End end to include provision for a gentlemen's lavatory. The ladies had theirs accessed from their waiting room although it's unclear if this was provided from the outset or at this time. The extension was carried out in the same design as the remainder of the building and within a short time, as Eric Morecambe would say, you couldn't see the join.

A new signal box was provided which was of the GWR Type 7 design in timber with a hipped slate roof and housed a 16-lever frame. This was brought into use on 14th June 1901. At the same time, the staff-and-ticket method of operation on the branch was replaced by a electric train staff with Bourne End South as the other end of the section.

All these works, which cost £2,226, were largely completed in time for the August 1901 staging of the regatta during which 2,300 passengers passed through the station.

This extract from the 1899 Ordnance Survey shows the revised layout of the goods yard including the short stub left from the original layout and the additional siding laid alongside the goods shed and cut into the platform. Although the cattle market has appeared there is still no sign of Lock Road.





*Soldiers of the 3rd Battalion, Grenadier Guards have arrived at Marlow on 4th June 1915 and are setting off on their march to Bovington Green.*

*Lens of Sutton*

*The new water tank is shown below together with the loco shed, coal stage and pump house plus the sawmill making an appearance.*

*J. H. Russell*

*The bottom photograph shows the exterior of the station as it appeared in 1955 although the only change was the new office provided for the station master in 1947. The 1902 extension was at the far end, beyond the vent pipe.*

*J. J. Davis*

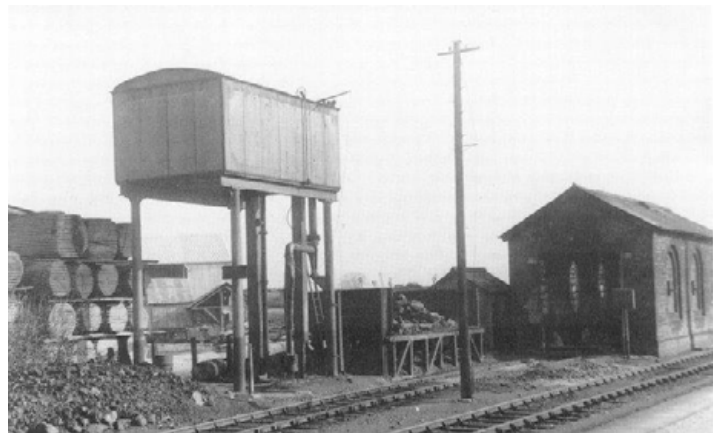
The use of the electric train staff was quite short-lived because in January 1914 the Marlow branch became the first to be equipped with the Electric Key Token system which had been developed by the GWR's S&T Works at Reading. (As an aside, the second section to get EKT working was St. Blazey to Luxulyan. Ironically, the present St. Blazey to Goonbarrow is the last on the national network worked this way and is due to be replaced at the end of this year.)

The same year saw the replacement of the roof-mounted water tank on the engine shed with a free-standing tank next to the coal stage. It had a capacity of 11,000 gallons and incorporated a delivery crane - the only watering facility on the branch. In addition to the tank a small brick building was erected next to the shed to house a steam-driven donkey pump used to fill the tank.

The First World War saw a good deal of military traffic as camps were constructed for troop training on Bovington Green and Marlow Common. Many of these troops arrived at or departed from Marlow station and marched through the town.

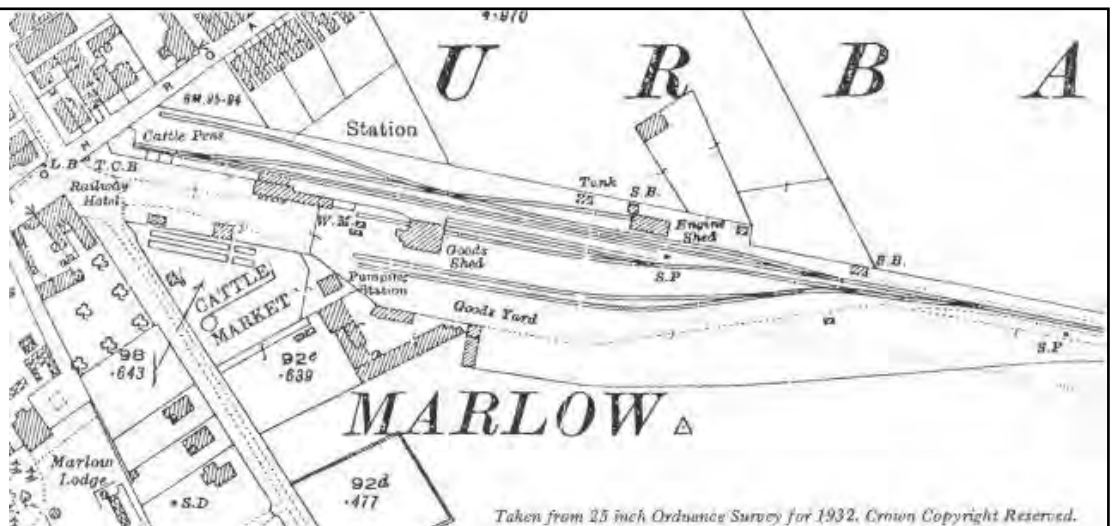
A new 20-ton capacity weighbridge was installed in 1928-9 replacing the original 5-ton example. A new plain brick building was erected to house the weighing machine located midway between the station building and the goods shed.

The only other changes of note in GWR days were the enlargement of the lean-to office at the goods shed during 1943 and the provision of an office for the Station Master at end of the station building in 1947. This was a very plain brick structure.



By the time of this 1932 OS map the station had reached its final form apart from the addition of the sawmill which occupied the area under the U and R. The 1947 private siding connection passed through where it says 'engine shed'.

It will also be noted that Lock Road has appeared along with considerable development in the area surrounding the station.



*1421 in the summer sun at Marlow on 17th July 1960.  
Gerald T. Robinson*



Until the Second World War goods traffic was what you'd expect to find on a country branch line; domestic coal, general merchandise, livestock (inbound and outbound) and outbound milk. There was also a small amount of outward agricultural produce, some manufactured items and some scrap metal. The only "unusual" traffic was bulk deliveries of salt for Wethered's brewery which arrived in those bright yellow, gable roofed wagons so popular with model railway manufacturers. Much of this traffic was handled by mixed trains rather than dedicated goods trains.

Things took a decidedly different course in 1941 when Greenwich Sawmills, which operated wharves and sawmills along the Thames in east London, secured a contract from the Ministry of Supply handling imported Canadian softwoods and African

hardwoods. With the vulnerability of their operations they understandably looked at safer locations and settled on a five acre adjacent to Marlow station which they bought from Y. J. Lovell.

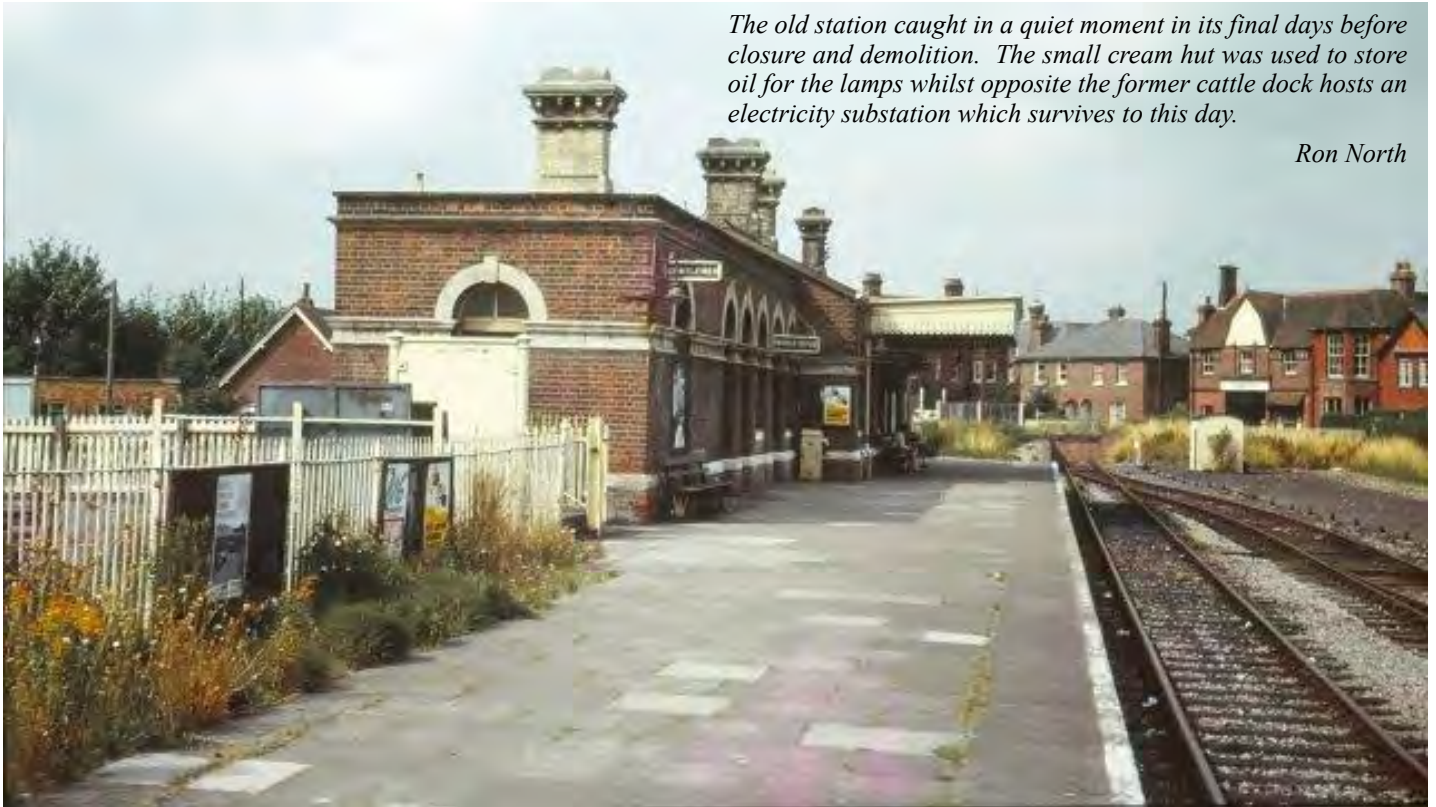
A sawmill was established here and initially supplies were unloaded in the goods yard and taken round the corner to the sawmill entrance off Dedmere Road by lorry. Some of the logs were massive and a new 6-ton crane was installed in the yard to handle them although occasionally additional mobile cranes had to be brought in.

The mill remained in use after the war and in 1947 a Private Siding Agreement with the GWR saw the site directly served by rail, some standard gauge track had already been laid within the mill and operated by two self-propelled steam cranes. The new

*On the final weekend of steam operation, 7/8th July 1962,  
1421 with autotrailer W229W enters the shed road for servicing.  
One of the two steam cranes of the Greenwich Sawmills  
can be seen in the background.*

*Mike Peart*





*The old station caught in a quiet moment in its final days before closure and demolition. The small cream hut was used to store oil for the lamps whilst opposite the former cattle dock hosts an electricity substation which survives to this day.*

*Ron North*

siding came off the run-round loop facing Bourne End and curved sharply behind the engine shed. Locomotives were not permitted to go beyond the gate separating the two properties but the mill's cranes could also be used for internal shunting.

Nationalisation initially had little effect on the branch but in an early bout of rationalisation Marlow Signal Box was closed on 26th September 1954. The token was abolished and replaced with a train staff (the same one still in use today) returning the line to how it was worked before 1901. All signals were removed and two ground frames provided, one at each end of the loop, and released by a key in the end of the staff. This of course, somewhat reduced the ability of the branch to handle excursion traffic and the like but BR no longer seemed interested.

The postwar years had also seen a steady decline in goods traffic on the branch as business was lost to road competition. In response the GWR introduced its Zonal system for handling small consignments which were concentrated at a central points, in Marlow's case Maidenhead, and distributed by railway lorry.

Regular goods services were withdrawn from Marlow on the 18th July 1966.

However, the traffic in connection with Greenwich Sawmills had continued to grow to the point that regular block trains of timber were running to Marlow from Bow Creek in East London. These ran via High Wycombe and were worked by Stratford-based crews and locomotives, usually Brush Type 2s (before they were routinely allocated to the WR) but from time to time an English Electric Type 3 might appear. On one occasion Martin Stoolman saw two BTH Type 1s (D83xx) come off the branch at Bourne End with the empties! No pictures of course, in fact your writer has yet to find any photographs of these trains but they certainly did run.

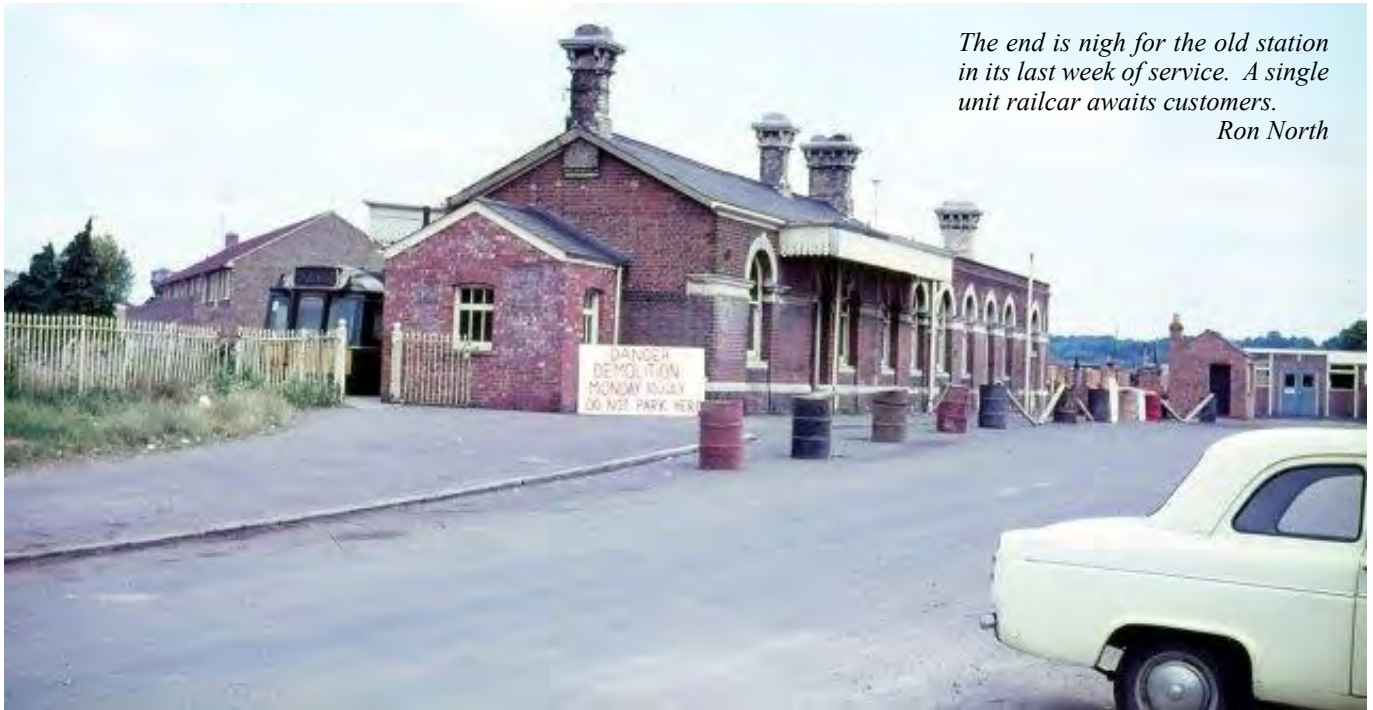
To facilitate these, following the introduction of Diesel railcars in July 1962 the engine shed was no longer required and was demolished soon after along with the lifting of Khartoum Siding. Around the same time the connection into the sawmill was removed which allowed an additional loop to be added

*A single unit railcar arriving at Marlow just before closure of the old station. To the left a wagon stands on the additional loop line laid in 1963. The 6-ton crane on the right was installed around 1941 to handle the sawmill traffic.*

*The line to the new platform runs in front of the line of trees in the background.*

*Ron North*





*The end is nigh for the old station in its last week of service. A single unit railcar awaits customers.  
Ron North*

alongside the existing loop. This new line was embedded in a concrete raft which permitted mechanical handling to be used for unloading which also replaced the internal system and steam cranes.

To allow further expansion, BR and Greenwich Sawmills came to an agreement that the former would take over the entire station site whilst the station would be resited alongside the back siding of the former goods yard.

This new facility can be best described as basic. A single 175 feet long platform was provided with no facilities beyond a seat and four lamp posts. There was no run round and the length of the branch reduced slightly to 2m 54c. A small wooden building was provided near the buffer stop which housed a ticket office which was staffed during the mornings only.

This measly facility came into use on 10th July 1967, the magnificent old station having closed the night before and was demolished within a few days. To add insult to injury, within about three years the sawmill abruptly closed and the block timber trains stopped running. The site was redeveloped into an industrial estate and today a row of terraced houses stand where once the *Marlow Donkey* could be found alongside the station building.

Worse was to come. By 1972, the station had become unstaffed all day and as a result the 1967 building was removed and replaced by a bus-type shelter behind the buffer stops. Combined with an enormous row of Leylandii trees which had been planted to screen the industrial estate and had been allowed to get out of control plus the residual coal business still being carried out on the other side of the platform made Marlow station an uninviting place to use.

There was an improvement in 1989 when a new brick shelter with a slate roof was built which looked better than the previous one but it still was largely open to the elements. It included a raised flower bed which for many years was lovingly tended by Mary Dove who became Marlow's unofficial station mistress earning her an MBE for her efforts. Sadly, she had a serious fall from which she never recovered.

With the addition of improved platform lighting (required for Driver Only Operation of the trains) and two of those modern NSE seats - one can argue if they are an improvement over the old GWR one - Marlow station had arrived at the condition we see today; a shadow of its former self but at least its still open for business.

*The three "new" stations. Top, the 1967 ticket office, middle the replacement shelter overshadowed by the trees seen in 1977 and finally the present structure nearing completion in November 1989*

*1967: unknown, others: Mike Walker*



## THE STATIONS... **BOURNE END**



Situated slightly under half way along the first section of the Wycombe Railway at 4 miles 33 chains from Maidenhead (28 miles 52 chains from Paddington) Bourne End has always been the principal intermediate station on the line. It was known as Marlow Road when the line opened as at that time Bourne End was a very small community and the station was located on the road to Marlow and was the nearest point to that popular riverside town.

As originally built it had a single platform located on the Down side of the line. The station building was to the standard Wycombe Railway design very similar to that at Cookham. It was constructed in red brick and flint with a slate roof and comprised a two-storey house at the Wycombe end and a single storey section containing the offices and a large open-fronted waiting area which accounted for slightly more than half the foot print of the single storey section.

A passing loop was provided but only allowed a goods train to pass a passenger train. A small goods yard was provided on the Down side behind the platform complete with a goods shed. Unfortunately no plan of the track layout appears to have survived or any photographs of the goods shed apart from the roof appearing in the background of an early photograph of the station building.

There was a level crossing at the immediate Wycombe end of the platform where the road to Cookham crossed the railway, the living accommodation in the station building being occupied by the crossing keeper. A second level crossing was provided where the road to Cores End crossed the line 12 chains further on. A house was also provided here for the crossing keeper on the Down side north of the crossing and was again of typical Wycombe Railway design almost identical to that at North Town Crossing.

Apart from the conversion of gauge in September 1870, little change took place until the construction of the Great Marlow Railway which opened on 27th June 1873. Initially, facilities for the GMR were somewhat basic. The goods yard was removed and replaced with a similar facility on the Up side opposite the station platform which included a new goods shed constructed in a mixture of red brick and probably incorporated materials recovered from the original. This had one siding running through it and doors for loading carts, later lorries, on each end with an internal island platform which included a 2-ton crane. A small lean-to office was provided attached to the Maidenhead end of the building.

The GMR entered Bourne End round a sharp curve from the west and terminated in a straight bay cut into the existing  
Page 13

*Two views of Marlow Road (as it was then) taken before the opening of the Great Marlow Railway showing the typical Wycombe Railway building in its original condition. In the view below the roof of the goods shed can also be seen.*



platform with its buffer stops just short of the station building. There was no run-round facility alongside the bay but a loop on the inside of the curve. Therefore, having arrived from Marlow the locomotive had to propel the train back out onto the curve before it could run round its train. Similarly there was no direct connection between the branch and main line except for one which required a switchback move through one of two sidings provided on the Down side between the river bridge and the junction. These were primarily to accommodate interchange traffic between the two lines.

A small signal box was provided at the junction points but no photographs or details of its frame and therefore the signals and points it operated have come to light.

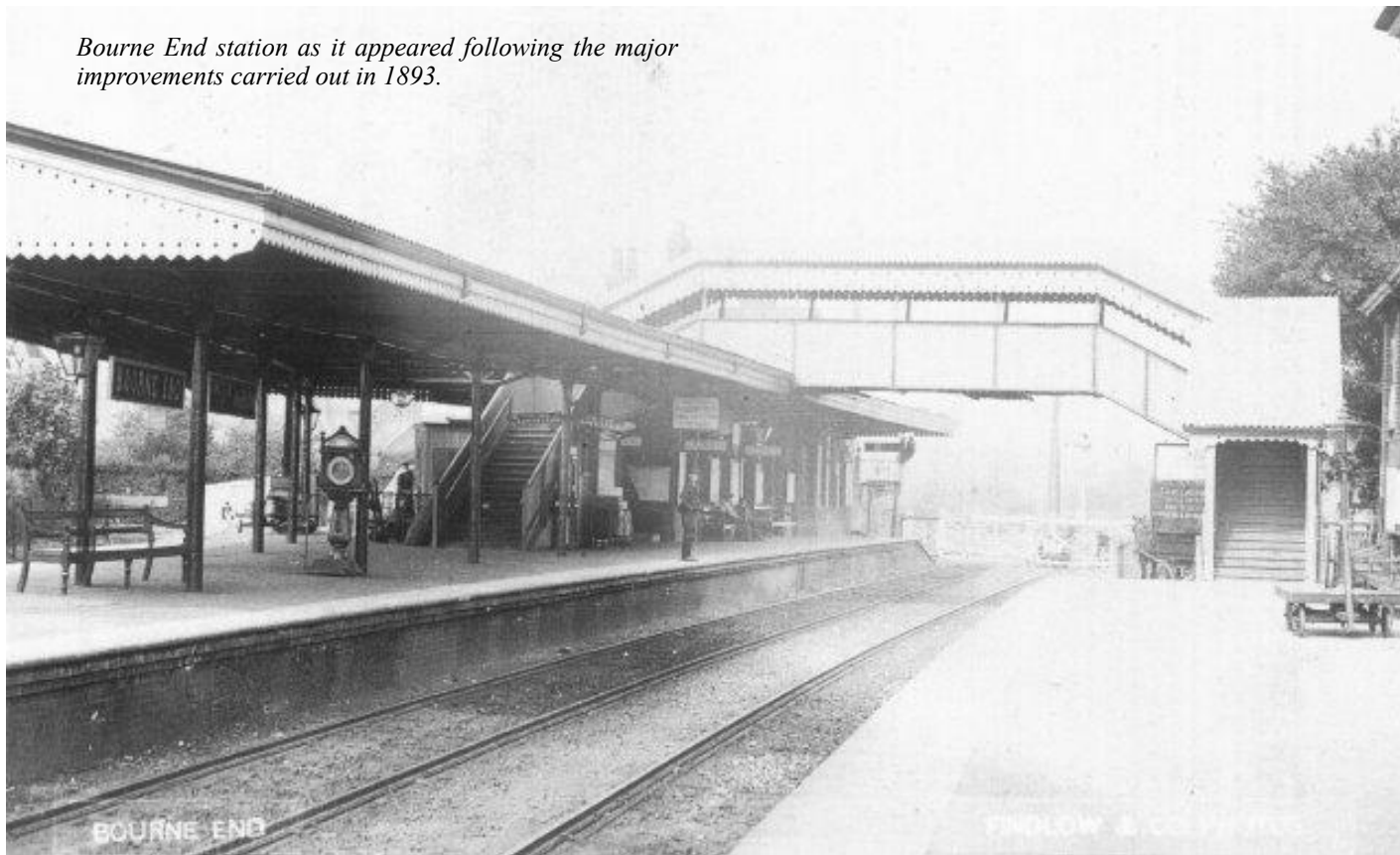
Soon after the opening of the GMR that company's directors expressed disquiet at the meagre facilities provided for their trains and passengers at Bourne End. In response a timber roof was provided covering part of the bay track and the adjacent platform.

With Marlow now connected directly to the railway network, the title "Marlow Road" might have been confusing so the station was renamed Bourne End with effect from 1st January 1874.

Despite the inadequacies of the layout and facilities, Bourne End remained essentially unchanged for almost the next twenty years. Major changes, however, took place in 1893 when the

The Marlow Donkey

*Bourne End station as it appeared following the major improvements carried out in 1893.*



GWR finally accepted the situation could not go on. As a result the whole layout was remodelled and the station improved.

First, a second platform on the Up side was finally provided. Strangely, this was not directly opposite the existing Down one but was staggered and about 50% longer than the existing one although the Marlow branch diverged midway along it, thereby greatly restricting the length of any train calling at Bourne End which was bound for Marlow.

The actual junction for Marlow was considerably improved and now consisted of a double connection from both the "main" lines which curved round to merge with each other and the line from the bay just before Brooksby level crossing on the branch. The bay platform was realigned and lengthened and now curved away from the main line continuing behind the station building right up to the railway boundary by the road. A run-round loop was also provided which continued out towards Brooksby level crossing meaning that no fewer than the four tracks now formed the curved approach from Marlow. Hard to believe when viewing the site today.

*An unidentified Gooch 131 Class 0-6-0 (possibly 311) at Bourne End circa 1900.*

*Collection of Martin Stoolman*



Other changes to the station were significant. The station house had been extended in 1889 with an additional gable on the north end. Unlike the rest of the building, this was in solid brick but otherwise matched the existing portion.

As part of the 1893 changes, the single storey section was extended and remodelled and now contained a booking hall with entrances from both the platform and forecourt, a booking office, general waiting room and ladies' waiting room. Both ladies' and gentleman's toilets were provided, the former accessible from within the ladies' waiting room, the latter from outside at the Maidenhead end with the obligatory wooden privacy screen in front of the door.

The most prominent addition was a standard GWR style footbridge linking the two platforms. This was a steel structure with plate girder sides, open for the upper part and with the stairs each side spilt into two sections, 90° to each other with a small landing between. A corrugated iron roof completed the structure. Equally prominent was a vast new canopy which covered the majority of the Down platform encompassing the footbridge and extending along the length of the station building and house. To complete the new facilities on the Down side there was an office for porters situated beneath the footbridge.

The new Up platform was not so well endowed receiving only a timber built waiting room. This was enlarged in 1931 to include ladies' toilets at Wycombe north end and gentlemen's toilets at the Maidenhead end. The building had a sloping, flat roof which was extended forward at the same time as the enlargement to provide shelter for anyone standing on the platform.

The revised layout required a major revision to the existing signalling and to bring it into line with the requirements of the Regulation of Railways Act of 1889. To achieve this, two signal boxes were provided at Bourne End both to what are termed the GWR Type 5 design by the Signalling Record Society. That is to say they had brick ground floors and rear wall of the upper floor with timber construction for the remainder of the upper floor. Open staircases were provided with a small entrance porch. The stairs of the South Box were originally at the south end but were repositioned to the north end, probably in the early 'thirties, to make it more convenient for the signaller when

exchanging the tokens. The stairs on the North Box were always at the north end. Both 'Boxes had gabled slate roofs and brick chimneys for the stove. The main windows had twelve equally-sized panes in each moving section. The South Signal Box, which was on the Down side in the vee of the junction at 28m 48c, had a 55-lever frame whilst the North Signal Box, on the Up side beyond the level crossing at 28m 56c, housed a 15-lever frame plus a wheel for working the level crossing gates.

At the same time, Cores End Level Crossing received an upgrade in much the same way as North Town Crossing with a 2-lever ground frame being provided to lock the main and wicket gates. As it was within "station limits" of North 'Box it was interlocked with Bourne End North's Up home and Down section signals neither of which could be cleared until Cores End crossing's gates had been closed to road users and locked. As at North Town, a small wooden hut was provided to shelter the crossing keeper and bore the nameplate Cores End Level Crossing Ground Frame – correctly designated unlike that at North Town!

In 1913 the Up platform was extended at the Wycombe end as far as the level crossing increasing its length to around 450 feet compared to the comparatively short 155 feet of the Down platform.

In addition to those mentioned above, other changes in the inter-war period saw the provision of a Carriage Siding on the Up side between the North 'Box and Cores End crossing in 1936 and a third Down siding between the river bridge and the South 'Box. Around the same time the bay run-round loop was extended further round the curve.

The two level crossings proved to be a source of frustration for local road users due to the amount of time they were closed for train movements, particularly during shunting. To make things worse, in post-war years when there was a sweet shop operating in the former coal office on the Cookham side of the station crossing (built in the 1920s) it was not unknown for the shunting engine to pause on the crossing whilst the fireman got his "tanner" (2½p) deposit back on an empty pop bottle! In 1933 plans were drawn up to replace both crossings with overbridges but the proposal was never carried out.

During the Second World War, another siding was provided alongside the Up Carriage Siding in 1943 for the use of Jacksons paper mill whilst the cattle dock was removed from the short, middle siding in the goods yard. The siding was then relaid with concrete blocks held together with steel tie bars rather than sleepers.

The station entered the British Railways era initially with little visible change but by the mid-fifties there was a move to make economies where possible. In the case of Bourne End questions were asked about the need for two signal boxes. As a result the layout was rationalised in the latter part of 1955. The connection between the Up main line and the Marlow branch was removed along with the bay run round line leaving just two lines

rounding the curve towards Marlow. This allowed the closure of Bourne End South Signal Box from 30th January 1956. In connection with this, Bourne End North Signal Box was extended at the High Wycombe end to enable it to house a 44-lever frame plus a separate 2-lever frame for the crossing wickets (previously included in the main frame). The gate wheel was retained. Whilst the extension was in the style of the existing structure, little attempt appears to have been made to match the colour of the brickwork or roofing!

At the same time, the crossing loop was shortened slightly at the Maidenhead end and the goods yard tracks now connected directly to the main line rather than to the Up loop line as previously. A 2-lever ground frame was provided to control the yard entrance point and associated facing point lock.

Following the withdrawal of goods services in September 1967 the yard tracks were lifted and the area turned into a car park. The goods shed, which had been largely disused for many years, survived and was for some time occupied by an engineering firm, Meltec Ltd., who manufactured medical equipment and had their office in a small building next to the station. This was built in the 1920s and was originally a coal office for Toomers. Later it served as a sweetshop, a taxi office, as the offices for Meltec and was then occupied by car-hire company Avis before becoming a popular café. Sadly, it suffered collateral damage as a result of a road traffic accident and was demolished in 2019. Today the goods shed is the home of the Bourne End Auction Rooms. At the same time as the yard was lifted the Up Sidings North were also taken out of use.

The two level crossings finally got modernised with full width, four arm lifting barriers of what is known as the "WR type" and flashing red signals for road users. Cores End was first being converted over the period 10th-16th April 1965 as part of a road improvement scheme and remained under the control of the crossing keeper. The Station Road crossing followed from 26th November 1967.

More fundamental changes were to come. From 4th May 1970 the line between Bourne End and High Wycombe was closed to all traffic and a set of stop blocks were installed just short of Cores End Level Crossing. This allowed the Marlow timber trains which had previously run via High Wycombe to run via Maidenhead and run round at Bourne End. However, it is doubtful if the trains ever used the new routing and on 13th June 1971 stop blocks were provided on both platform lines on the station side of the level crossing whose barriers were taken away the following month.

The (North) Signal Box was now in splendid isolation but not for long. On 22nd August 1971 it was replaced by a 5-lever ground frame at the Maidenhead end of the Down platform adjacent to the branch junction points. To accommodate this,

*Two views showing the station and layout of the junction before the era of rationalisation started.*





the bay platform line was taken out of use and partly lifted. Apart from the two platform lines and the branch the only other track remaining was one of the Down sidings. All signalling was removed apart from fixed distant on both lines approaching the station. "No Signaller Token" working was established, initially between Cookham and Bourne End with staff working retained on the Marlow branch. A wooden hut was provided alongside the ground frame to house the token instrument. The Down siding was removed in December 1971 whilst the ground frame was amended in September 1973 reducing the number of levers to three. In addition to the token instrument next to the ground frame, a second instrument was provided at the Wycombe end of the Up platform for use by trains terminating on that line.

Also during the late summer of 1971, an extension was constructed to the two platforms connecting them between the newly installed stop blocks and Station Road. This allowed the removal of the footbridge along with the extensive canopy on the Down platform although a short new one was attached to the front of the station building.

The station had now returned to the sort of basic provision of WRC days. For most of the day, the station was unstaffed except for a booking clerk who was on duty each day until lunchtime. Compare this with 1934 when there were 21 staff on the books for the station.

Subsequently the railway owned land formerly occupied by the bay platform and loop was sold off and was replaced by commercial development which has more recently changed to residential flats.

The station facilities were extensively refurbished and modernised during 1986. This included a new glass fronted booking office replacing the traditional "hole-in-the-wall" window and expansion of the office which replaced the general waiting room although the ladies waiting room and associated toilet, along with the gents, remained following refurbishment.

At the same time, the Up side waiting room, which had been disused for several years, was removed. This was done on 13th September 1986 when a crane first removed the roof then the rest of the structure was lifted in one piece onto a low-loader for transport to Sir William McAlpine's estate at Fawley, between Marlow and Henley, where it was positioned alongside the junction on his private railway and named Bourne Again Junction.

With effect from 22nd February 2008 the ground frame was replaced by a modern Ground Switch Panel and the remaining two points were motorised. The GSP and the associated token instrument along with an Annett's key device for the Marlow branch staff are housed in a new building that took the place of the former ground frame. The auxiliary instrument remained unaltered on the Up platform.



*After the rationalisation of the seventies, L285 and a single power car at Bourne End waiting to go to Marlow after the connection from Maidenhead arrives on 5th September 1980.*

*Nigel Hunt*

In connection with this change two signals were installed, although both are officially classified as "Points Indicators". Both are single lens 2-aspect LED signals capable of displaying red or yellow aspects and have alpha-numeric standard route indicators. BE1 at the end of the Down platform can display M for Main (or Maidenhead) and B for the branch to Marlow. BE3 which is in the Down direction between the bridge and points (BE2B) shows D or U depending on whether the road is set for the Down or Up platform. A Stop board reminding drivers to obtain the token before proceeding is provided for departures from the Up platform whilst a similar one but with reference to token or staff is provided at the end of the Down platform. There is no signal approaching from Marlow apart from the fixed distant (both were renewed with LED units at this time) as trains from Marlow can only access the Down platform.

It had been hoped that this modernisation would improve reliability but there have been issues with the 19th century token and staff instruments interfacing with the 21st century GSP. Network Rail have subsequently procured some new token instruments which has improved matters but failures still occur bringing services to a stop until a "human token" can be provided and the technicians restore normality.

Following the cessation of through trains between Bourne End and Paddington on 19th May 2017, GWR Managing Director Mark Hopwood felt that it was not fair to expect commuters from Marlow to have to change trains twice (at Bourne End and Maidenhead) in the first eight miles of their journey during peak hours. Additionally, it was seen as desirable to have a two-trains per hour service throughout the day without the need to change at Bourne End – experience elsewhere, on the Falmouth branch for example, had shown that doubling the train service more than doubles the ridership.

A scheme was therefore prepared to, in effect, restore the pre-1956 double junction arrangement. GWR worked hard to prepare a scheme and secure promises of the necessary funding but Network Rail called in consultants W S Atkins to examine the scheme. A weekend possession was taken to carry out a detailed survey of the site which concluded that the GWR proposal was not possible as it would not conform to current standards. A number of alternatives were put forward and each was also found deficient. In the end, the final scheme created was almost identical to the GWR proposal! In the meantime much of the funding promises had lapsed and with the huge rises in the cost of any infrastructure work on the railway it now seems unlikely the project will ever be brought to reality.

*Bourne End today, 165121 forming 2B36, the 14:39 Maidenhead to Marlow; this was the first occasion a green 2-car Class 165 had been used on the branch. 1st February 2018.*

*Mike Walker*  
Page 16



# SERVICES & TRAINS

When first opened the branch enjoyed a weekday service of ten trains each way. By 1902 this had risen to twelve and sixteen by 1910. Services appear to have peaked at 23 daily in 1938 before settling down to around 20 during the BR period. Today there are 25 scheduled journeys.

Until the early 1960s virtually all services would be confined to running between Marlow and Bourne End although for many years there was an evening train that ran through to Maidenhead and return.

As an example of how the line was worked in the early part of the last century we can study the October 1910 timetable reproduced below. With the locomotive based at Marlow, services would commence from that end starting with a goods train to Bourne End departing at 6.00 am. In those days, there was usually an early goods train on most branches conveying traffic, particularly perishables, urgently needed by local traders. After being allowed an hour to shunt at Bourne End it arrived back in Marlow at 7.20 am and then took out the first passenger train of the day leaving Marlow at 7.52 am (today the first departure is at 06:06). Note that six minutes were allowed for the journey compared with seven today although neither the frequency nor regularity of departures came anywhere near that of today. The 9.45 from Marlow ran through to Maidenhead arriving there at 10.05. This must have required a second locomotive from Bourne End as the branch engine returned light directly from Bourne End at 9.52. The stock provision for this working is a mystery as there was no balancing down passenger or empty stock workings.

Apart from this, the rest of the day's workings were simple shuttles between Marlow and Bourne End. There were two more goods trains each way scheduled for the early afternoon and in the evening although on Saturdays the former was replaced by an additional passenger service. In addition the 4.35 from Bourne End is shown as a mixed train presumably to convey any urgent Marlow traffic that had arrived at Bourne End on the 11.40 am Oxford to Taplow goods. Taplow was the originating point for most of the goods trains serving the Maidenhead to Wycombe line as the yard at Maidenhead was inconveniently sited for such purposes.

It will also be noted that on Wednesdays and Saturdays an extra late night train was run although, curiously it did not connect with a train in either direction at Bourne End and was therefore only intended for local business following a good night out. Wednesday was traditionally early closing day in Marlow.

It should be remembered that at this time, the branch was served by traditional locomotive hauled trains with run rounds being performed at each end. The first appearance of push-pull or "Autotrains" on the branch didn't occur until the late 1920s when a single round trip to Marlow originating at Reading was introduced. In 1927 this left Reading at 6.25 am and Bourne End at 7.05 then departing from Marlow at 7.26. This was to allow the branch locomotive to be used on a goods service which arrived from Bourne End shortly before the Auto's departure.

During the 20s and 30's the provision of through trains on and off the branch became more common. In most cases these were actually through carriages rather than trains with the portions being attached to the rear of the branch train. On arrival at Bourne End it would run into the Down platform, stopping initially to allow any local passengers to alight before drawing forward over the crossing to permit the locomotive of the connecting train (waiting in the Up platform) to remove the through carriages and attach them to the front of its own.

By this period the early morning goods train from Marlow had been replaced by a workers train popular with those employed at Jackson's Mill in Bourne End. It returned as a mixed again popular with the mill workers as the timings coincided with a shift change. Initially this mixed working had been unadvertised.

In addition to regular scheduled trains, Marlow was a popular destination for special excursion trains particularly on Sundays. Some ran only to Marlow whilst others were part of more ambitious itineraries which involved river cruises on Salter's famous steamers between Marlow and Windsor or occasionally Henley or Reading. These didn't only originate from other parts of the GWR but also from further afield including such places as Newcastle, Manchester, Derby, Weymouth and the West of England. In 1935 alone there were no less than 70 such specials handled at Marlow.

These brought main line locomotives onto the branch. Under the GWR's route availability system the Marlow branch was classified "red dotted" which meant that normally "uncoloured", "yellow" or "blue" group locomotives were permitted but red group ones could be used subject to a 20 mph limit on the branch. As a result Saints, Halls and even Castles were regular visitors to Marlow. After arrival, these locomotives would run light to Slough for turning and servicing before taking their return workings. "Foreign" locomotives occasionally made it to Bourne End but not to Marlow.

Passenger Trains to carry "B" Head Lights on these Branches.		<b>MARLOW BRANCH.</b> SINGLE LINE.—Worked by Electric Train Staff. Eight-wheel Coaches must not be worked in or out of the Marlow Branch Bay Line at Bourne End Station.																												Goods Trains to carry "X" Head Lights on these Branches.		
		WEEK DAYS.																														
Distances	STATIONS.	Station No.	2	3	4	5	7	9	11	13	15	17	19	21	23	25	27	29	31	33	35	37	39	41	43	45	47	Pass. Wed. & Sat.	Night			
2.38	Bourne End dep.	155	A.M. 7 10	A.M. 8 5	..	A.M. 8 49	A.M. 9 52	A.M. 10 21	A.M. 11 14	P.M. 12 15	P.M. 1 4	P.M. 1 40	P.M. 1 57	..	P.M. 2 40	P.M. 3 2	..	P.M. 4 35	..	P.M. 5 45	P.M. 6 45	P.M. 7 35	P.M. 8 18	P.M. 8 38	P.M. 9 39	P.M. 11 0	1 10					
	Marlow arr.	160	7 20	8 11	..	8 56	9 58	10 27	11 20	12 26	1 10	1 52	2 3	..	2 47	3 8	..	4 41	..	5 51	6 51	7 45	8 24	9 8	9 47	11 6	1 16					
	STATIONS.	Goods	Pass.	Pass.	Pass.	Pass.	Pass.	Pass.	Pass.	Pass.	Pass.	Pass.	Pass.	Pass.	Pass.	Pass.	Pass.	Pass.	Mixed Pass. & G'ds	Pass.	Pass.	Pass.	Pass.	Pass.	Pass.	Pass.	Pass.	Pass.				
	Marlow dep.	6 0	..	..	A.M. 7 52	A.M. 8 35	..	9 45	10 51	11 0	12 5	12 50	1 39	2 47	3 39	4 2	5 32	..	P.M. 6 25	P.M. 7 25	..	8 25	P.M. 8 35	P.M. 9 22	P.M. 10 45	12 56						
	Bourne End arr.	6 10	..	..	7 58	8 38	..	9 51	10 57	11 6	12 11	12 46	1 35	2 43	3 35	4 18	5 28	..	6 38	7 37	..	8 37	9 45	10 51	12 1	1 9						
	SUNDAYS.	Pass.	Pass.	Pass.	Pass.	Pass.	Pass.	Pass.	Pass.	Pass.	Pass.	Pass.	Pass.	Pass.	Pass.	Pass.	Pass.	Pass.	Pass.	Pass.	Pass.	Pass.	Pass.	Pass.	Pass.	Pass.	Pass.	Pass.				
	Bourne End dep.	8 38	9 51	10 34	..	11 49	..	3 45	6 12	8 31	..	10 48	..	8 50	12 25	..	Marlow .dep.	8 22	9 38	10 19	11 30	..	..	P.M. 3 30	P.M. 4 29	P.M. 6 19	..	7 28	..	8 48	10	..
	Marlow .arr.	8 44	9 57	10 40	..	11 55	..	3 40	5 18	8 36	..	10 49	..	9 49	12 31	..	Bourne End arr.	8 28	9 44	10 25	11 36	..	..	3 36	5 36	7 21	..	7 32	..	8 48	16	..

Maximum Loads of Goods Trains.—Bourne End to Marlow: 20 Coal, 30 Goods, or 40 Empties. Marlow to Bourne End: 20 Coal, 20 Goods, or 40 Empties.  
 Q On Saturdays the engine of 7.45 p.m. Goods works 1.57 p.m. Pass. Bourne End to Marlow.



Ordinary services from the opening were handled by small tank locomotives. Initially these were the 517 class 0-4-2s built at Wolverhampton and the forerunners of the later 48xx class. The first to be allocated to Marlow was 522 which was built in 1868 and was initially sent to the Aylesbury & Buckingham Railway (which the GWR operated) before coming to Marlow. It was still in its original condition as a saddle tank, conversion of the class to side tanks didn't take place until the 1890s. The same type dominated the service throughout the 19th century.

After 1900 the locomotives of choice for the *Marlow Donkey* were the 2-4-0 Metro tanks; so called because of their original use on the many through trains off the GWR to The City over the Metropolitan. They came in three varieties, Small, Medium and Large with all three showing up at Marlow at various times, many still with condensing gear in place. A regular performer pre-WWI was no.5 of the Small type.

Marlow was a sub-shed of Slough and it was the normal practice for one locomotive to be stationed at Marlow for a week, arriving first thing on Monday and departing at the end of service on Sunday.

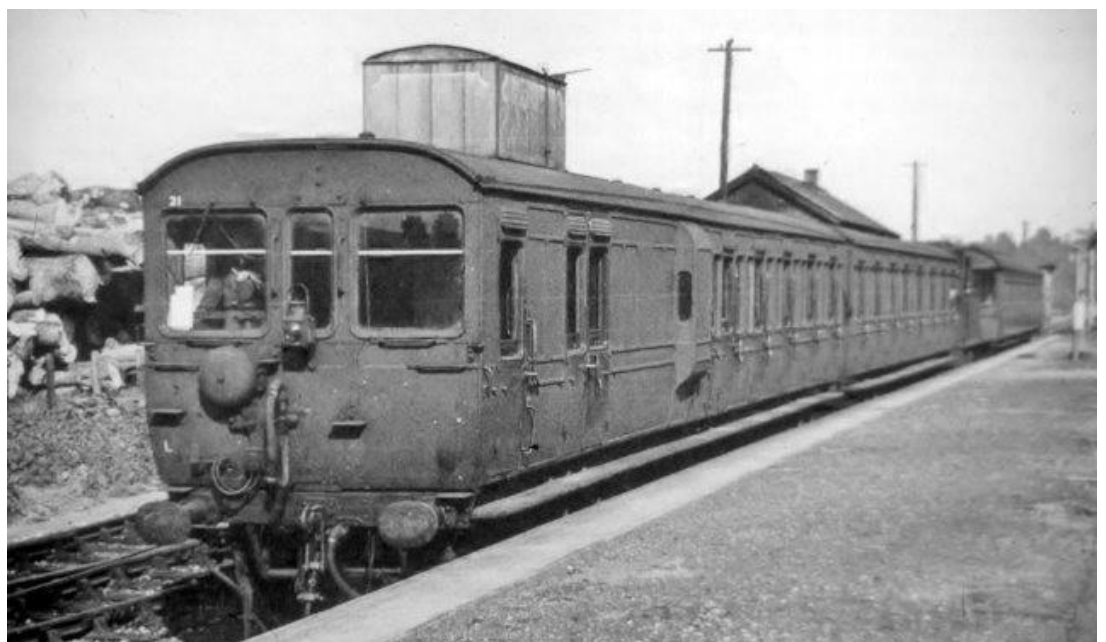
Carriages employed during this period were a motley bunch of 4 and 6 wheeled compartment type vehicles. The GWR was not in the habit of building stock specifically for branch line or secondary services instead they had to rely on stock cascaded down from more important duties. By the finish of World War I bogie non-corridor stock was becoming the norm although still quite elderly by the time it appeared on the branch.

Through trains were routinely worked by Churchward's 4-4-2 2221 or 'County' class tanks until they were replaced by the familiar 61xx Large Prairie tanks from 1932 onwards.

*The majority of the trailers used on the Marlow Donkey were of the familiar open saloon type but for a short period around nationalisation this two-coach set was allocated to the service.*

*Called 'Clifton Down' sets because they were first used on the Clifton Down service in Bristol, they were originally built as D27 Brake 3rds and E58 composites around 1898. Eight pairs were converted between 1913 and 1916 and they survived until 1950. This photo taken at Marlow must have been on regatta day as there is also a saloon trailer.*

J. H. Russell



*Examples of locomotives which worked the 'Donkey in its early years. 535 (left) is an example of the 517 class after conversion from saddle to side tanks around 1885. Although photographed at Swindon, it was recorded working at Marlow in 1897.*

*Metro tank 623 (right) is of the so-called Small version (the reference was to the size of the tanks) and was allocated to Marlow between 1906 and 1908.*

Regular Autotrain working of the branch commenced in July 1935 and would remain the standard method of operation until the end of steam 27 years later. These were worked by the newly introduced Collett 48xx (later 14xx) 0-4-2Ts, 4827, 4838 and 4847 were the first used on the branch although in those days allocations appear to have been far more fluid than they became in BR days. For the trailers, the shorter variety were preferred as the curvature of the bay at Bourne End caused a large gap to appear at the central passenger door particularly if a 70 footer was used. It was common practice to allow passengers to board and alight through the driving compartment.

An unusual feature of Auto operation on the branch was that it was authorised to run without a guard unless the train was running as a mixed - an early form of DOO; as they say nothing's ever really new.

With Marlow having the only locomotive watering and servicing facilities on the branch it was the practice to allow a couple of periods for servicing in the timetable each day. The intended operation was for the loco to leave the train in the platform and go to the shed but following the introduction of Autotrains it became common for the loco to take the trailer with it. If time was short, the station staff would then accompany any outward



passengers off the end of the platform and across the tracks to the shed where they could climb aboard the trailer using the retractable steps. The train would then depart from the loop rather than the platform road. Not exactly in accordance with the rules but back then both staff and public were credited with having common sense and in such far flung outposts rules were liable to be bent or stretched to suit local needs.

Mixed trains could also present passengers with a challenge. The wagons were marshalled behind the trailer and on a good day there might have been as many as twenty or more wagons and a Toad (goods brake). As a result the passenger accommodation and loco would be found at the very far end of the lengthy (post 1902) platform. One wonders how many intending passengers stepping onto the platform from the booking hall thought they were to be conveyed in an empty coal wagon!

The early BR years saw little change in the services on the branch. The September 1950 timetable showed a total of 24 services the first down one of which was a mixed train plus the traditional additional late train on Wednesday and Saturday evenings. There was a lengthy lull in services from Marlow at this time between the 10.40 arrival from Bourne End to the 12.18 departure which allowed the locomotive to be serviced and the yard shunted although an additional passenger train at 11.40 filled the gap on Saturdays. The Bourne End pilot engine was dispatched light to Marlow in the afternoon to work a goods train back.

By 1958 the service was still 24 trains daily plus a couple more on Saturdays but the 10.05 continued through to Maidenhead as did the last two of the day leaving Marlow at 10.23 and 11.21 pm., the Wednesday and Saturday late trains had finished.

*Examples of the saloon trailers. Sitting on the shed road at Marlow (left) in June 1952 we see 70 foot trailers 58 and 33 both of Diagram L and built in 1908 and 1906 respectively.*

*R. C. Riley*

*The final type used were those built by BR to a Hawksworth design which, whilst following the traditional layout, were flush sided and of generally more modern design. 25 were built and the first two were named; W221W Wren is seen in the South Sidings at Bourne End in July 1962.*

*Mike Peart*

At that time the 12.28 (SX) from Marlow was shown as mixed although there appears to be no corresponding down train. Until 1962, BR published separate passenger and freight working timetables and unfortunately the author does not have access to the latter for 1958 but in 1960 a goods train was shown leaving Bourne End for Marlow at 9.30 am on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays with a mixed leaving Marlow at 1.00, Saturdays excepted. In addition there was a path for a goods train from Marlow to Bourne End at 3.40 which returned as a light engine at 4.00. This presumably used the branch passenger loco and is shown as a 'Q' service - runs as required. Strangely, the timetable do not indicate how or when the locomotive of the morning goods got back to Bourne End and beyond.

Steam working of the branch ceased on Sunday 8th July 1962 with 1421 doing the honours suitably bulled up by Slough shed. From the following morning services were in the hands of the Pressed Steel single car diesel units often running with the matching driving trailers. Some through trains merited the 3-car versions. This was to be the standard fare for most of the next 30 years.



*Compartment trailers made a brief return to the branch in the final months of steam operation. W250W seen here behind 1445 entering Bourne End in March 1962 was one of twelve Brake 3rds converted to trailers in 1953 initially for use in South Wales but they were displaced further afield by dieselisation. Because of the single large window in the end of the driving compartment they were called 'Cyclops'.*

*C.R. Gordon-Stewart / Colour Rail*

*On the frosty morning of 24th November 1973, Pressed Steel single unit 55030 with a matching driving trailer rolls into Bourne End from Marlow.*

*Mike Walker*



The initial diesel timetables were little changed although the first train of the day now started from Bourne End running light from Slough at 7.00 am as the branch train was no longer kept at Marlow. Thereafter there were 21 departures daily from Marlow (with a couple more on Saturdays) six of which continued through to Maidenhead and one to High Wycombe. In the down direction, there were also two trains which originated at High Wycombe and one from Princes Risborough. On Sundays all trains from Marlow ran through to Maidenhead as by then there was no Sunday service between Bourne End and High Wycombe.

By the end of the sixties the service pattern had changed somewhat with most services from Marlow running through to Maidenhead with a separate shuttle service between Bourne End and High Wycombe. Gradually the connections at Bourne End in both directions became more inconvenient which not surprisingly caused the number of passengers using the northern section of the branch to drop significantly. As a result, BR closed the Bourne End to High Wycombe section from 4th May 1970, although as there was no Sunday service, the last trains ran on Saturday 2nd.

The service now consisted of hourly off-peak through trains between Marlow and Maidenhead but during the peak it is split into two shuttles, Marlow to Bourne End and Bourne End to Maidenhead which allows two trains per hour to be operated. With minor alterations to the actual times over the years, this is the pattern of service that continues to be provided today.

During the final years before closure of the northern section, the only goods traffic was the Bow Creek to Marlow company timber train for Greenwich Sawmills. The final, pre-closure timetable of May 1969 - May 1970 show this as running on Tuesdays and Fridays only departing High Wycombe at 12:23 and arriving at Marlow at 12:50. The return working left Marlow at 13:30 and reached High Wycombe at 13:58. In both

directions the locomotive ran round at High Wycombe with the train being routed over the Chiltern line, Greenford Loop, Acton and the North London Line. The exact dates when this started running and finished haven't come to light but it is interesting to note that the May 1970 timetable had a path available for the train to run via Maidenhead which is why, initially, at Bourne End the track was left in situ beyond the station almost to Cores End Crossing to permit the locomotive to run round. However, it is not thought that this was ever used.

As previously mentioned, the primary type of DMU used on the branch was the Pressed Steel single and 3-car units. However, from late May 1970, three 2-car Park Royal units were transferred from the LMR to Reading for use on the Thames Valley branches. This was to permit conductor-guard working allowing that person to work both cars. In the event their stay was short-lived and in less than a year they were transferred to the West of England. It has to be admitted that they were in pretty poor shape.

The service then reverted to the Pressed Steel units requiring the guard to deftly switch between coaches during station stops. By the mid-1980s several 2-car Metro-Cammell sets were allocated to Reading and were in much better condition having been through the refurbishment programme as had the Pressed Steels. By the start of the nineties though the DMU fleet was being run down and the fleet became ever more varied including the use of BRCW Class 104s intended for the Gospel Oak-Barking service. Virtually any type of DMU could appear and you never knew what to expect from one day to the next.

The first "Turbo" to appear on the branch was 165005 for an exhibition at Bourne End on 31st August 1991 but regular services using the new trains didn't start until 1993. It comes as something of a surprise to realise they have now been in use for 30 years with no prospect of replacement soon.



*Still in almost brand-new condition, 165001 approaches Spade Oake Crossing on its way from Marlow to Bourne End and Maidenhead on 12th March 1994.*

*Mike Walker*

# ALONG THE WAY...



1450 sets out from the bay at Bourne End heading for Marlow in September 1960, unusually the locomotive is pulling towards Marlow whereas the usual practice was for it to push.

*Gerald T. Robinson*

1421 rumbles across Marlow Viaduct into Bourne End with the *Marlow Donkey* on 14th April 1962. This 50 yard structure, the only one on the branch, crosses the stream from the Abbotsbrook estate into the Thames.

*Nick Lera*





1421 passing behind the Upper Thames Sailing Club approaching Bourne End with 10:42 *Marlow Donkey* from Marlow on the last day of steam operation, Sunday 8th July 1962.

*John Cramp*

1450 returned to the branch on 15th July 1973 to mark the centenary. In the miserable conditions that persisted all day, it approaches Spade Oak crossing - facing the right way.

*Tony Caton*





Celebrity T305 passing Westhorpe at Little Marlow on 31st August 1991. The old gravel pits, now used for recreational purposes, used to have their own 2 foot gauge railway system.

*Mike Walker*

6128 approaching Marlow with the Great Western Preservation Society's 'Thames-side Rail Tour' on 21st April 1963.

*Mike Walker collection*







1421 has just passed Mill Lane Crossing leaving Marlow for Bourne End on 14th April 1962. The compartment railer is probably W250W.

*Nick Lera*

The same combination leaves Marlow six days later. The clean brickwork on the shed end wall is a reminder of an unfortunate "incident" a few years previously.

*Colour-Rail*





A general view of Marlow station from the end of 'Khartoum' siding with 1445 and a scruffy trailer forming the 'Donkey' on 6th July 1962.

*Colour-Rail*

Finally, the fire is thrown out of 1421 on Marlow shed on 29th June 1962, the coal wagon would be a perfect model..

*Mike Walker collection*

