

# Marlow & District Railway Society

THE MARLOW DONKEY NO 23

~~Please reply to:-~~  
JUNE 1982

## CHAIRMAN'S NOTES

Unfortunately I was unable to be in Didcot at the end of March for the 21st birthday of the Great Western Society. I did however make a trip to the centre on a subsequent Sunday. Since my last visit a great deal has happened on the 15 acre site formerly a busy GWR engine depot. A typical GWR country station has been recreated, incorporating a separate ticket office; there is a smart signal box nearby, and the work is going ahead to lay a demonstration section of broad gauge track leading to a wooden transfer shed. The locomotive stud is so nearly representative of the engines seen at Didcot in steam days it seems a pity a "King" cannot be added. The Barry hulk would appear past resurrection but the Quainton based example would fare better there where it could be restored under cover with a 50 ton hoist available. Our old friend 6106 the prairie which worked on the Maidenhead - Bourne End shuttle in 1973, has been stripped down - a 50 year old veteran of the "tanner oners" which worked on London's suburban trains.

Plans are afoot to restore A4 4-6-2 4468 Mallard to running order in time for a celebratory appearance in 1988. It was on 3 July 1938 that this engine made her historic record breaking burst of speed, as is recorded on the plaques affixed to the locomotive by the proud directors of the LNER.

British Rail must be heartily tired of the adverse criticism levelled at them in the Press. Certainly an amount of this is justifiable but pressure by Mr Howell the Transport Secretary for them to get their costs under control and to cut out the restrictive practices assails the Board on one side while on the other the two major rail unions are threatening widespread disruption in the months to come. The chairman of the Central Transport Consultation Committee states that the railways are suffering from the "dwindles" by which she means apparently closing more lines "by stealth". Cuts in services are to be accompanied by closing the engineering works at Shildon and reducing the labour force at Horwich, Swindon and Derby. BR plan to reduce their locomotive stock from 3695 to 2798, their carriages from 21168 to 15150 and their wagons from 132000 to a mere 34000. This to be accomplished by 1986. Road transport must be delighted.

No such gloom appears in the preservation scene. Admittedly gates are generally down. It costs more to visit steam centres and petrol needed to reach these places is expensive, but news from the preservation groups is encouraging. The Mid-Hants volunteers are pushing their Watercress line through to Alton and the Festiniog Railway has reached its new terminus at Blaenau Festiniog. For £250 one can even go on an Awayday to Venice by restored Pullmans and Wagon Lits!

THURSDAY NIGHT PROGRAMME AT 19.45 HOURS FOR 20.00 HOURS

- 15th July 1982 - "6024, the Restoration, from the Horses Mouth!"  
Talk with slides by D K Polley of the 6024 Preservation Society
- 19th August 1982 - No meeting but an evening visit has been arranged to Pendon Museum by coach from High Wycombe and Marlow. Details from Mike Walker
- 16th September 1982 - "Steam in the North East" A return visit by Done Fendley who gave us a fascinating talk two years ago
- 21st October 1982 - Members 15 minute talks Our annual opportunity for members to talk about their "pet" subjects Offers to Mike Walker please
- 18th November - "Indian Railways" A talk with slides by Pete Greatorex of his experiences of Indian Railways
- 16th December 1982 - Railway Film Show Details still to be confirmed
- 20th January 1983 - Annual General Meeting followed by members slides

ANNUAL CLUB EXCURSION

This is planned for Sunday, 18th July to the Kent and East Sussex Railway  
Details from Stan Verrinder

FAWLEY STEAM EVENING

Following from the offer by Ron Brooks of a visit to Fawley, members and their families are invited to a Steam Evening at Fawley on Saturday, 11th September 1982. Details from Colin Gooding.

CHRISTMAS DINNER

It is hoped to arrange a Christmas Dinner again this year For details and reservations contact Mike Norris

CHILTERN TRAINS

Excursions from joint line stations including High Wycombe are as follows:

- 20th June - Isle of Wight incl Steam Railway  
18th July - Severn Valley Railway or Llangollen Steam Railway or Chester  
15th August - Carnforth, Lakeside and Haverthwaite Railway or Lake Windermere Cruise  
10th-11th Sept - Dieppe or Rouen  
18th Sept - Cardiff  
24th Sept - Blackpool Illuminations  
25th Sept - Blackpool Illuminations  
16th Oct - France

Details from Chiltern Trains, 1 Druids Walk, Chinnor, Oxford, OX9 4JF  
(Tel Kingston Blount 52198)

## MARLOW - MAIDENHEAD PASSENGERS ASSOCIATION

One excursion from Marlow, Bourne End, Cookham and Maidenhead

4th July - Diss, Great Yarmouth or Bressingham Steam Centre

Details from MMPA, 2 Mill Court, Cores End Road, Bourne End  
(Tel Bourne End 28810)

### KEITH COACHES

Coach tours of rail interest from Aylesbury conducted by your Secretary,  
Roger Bowen:

4th July - East Somerset Railway and Oakhill Manor  
24th July - Great Central Trail  
2nd-3rd October - Brunel Weekend  
23rd October - Great Central Trail

The Brunel Weekend is joint with BR (Western Region) and is available from  
Paddington and stations to Reading (one-way coach, one-way rail)

The Great Central Trails are joint with BR (London Midland Region) are also  
available from London Marylebone (one-way coach, one-way rail)

The East Somerset Tour will also pick up in High Wycombe

Details from Keith Coaches, 30 Buckingham Street, Aylesbury, HP20 2LH  
(Tel Aylesbury 28686)

### EVENING CLASSES

Advance notice is given that "History of the Southern Railway" is the subject  
of a 10 week series commencing on Wednesday, 22nd September 1982 at the  
Grange County Secondary School, Wendover Way, Aylesbury. This will be  
repeated after Christmas at the Raans County Secondary School, Amersham.  
Tutor is Roger Bowen.

### FILM SHOW

John Huntley will be presenting another railway film evening at the Civic  
Theatre, Aylesbury on Tuesday, 19th October 1982.

### EXHIBITION

The Princes Risborough Model Railway Society (Founder Member, Stan Verrinder)  
will be holding "Railex 82" at the Civic Hall, Aylesbury, on Saturday, 9th  
October 1982.

### INTERNATIONAL RAILWAY PRESERVATION SYMPOSIUM

Under the auspices of the Transport Trust to be held at the Imperial College  
of Science, Exhibition Road, London SW7 on Friday, 24th September 1982.  
Details from the Transport Trust at Marylebone Station, London NW1 6JR.

Anyone who has walked through the churchyard of St Lawrence in the centre of Reading will have seen the memorial to Henry West who was killed by a whirlwind at Reading Station on 24 March 1840. There have been doubts raised about the accuracy of the statement, after all whirlwind deaths are somewhat rare in this country. However it has been renewed on several occasions, the last being in 1971 by Reading Corporation, which seems to bear on its authenticity.

In a question on the Brain of Britain contest on Radio 4 in May 1982, Reading Station was featured. None of the contestants were successful which was not surprising in view of the nature of the question, which was "Which famous author lost the first manuscript of his book when changing trains at Reading Station". The answer was T E Lawrence of "Lawrence of Arabia" fame and the book was "The Seven Pillars of Wisdom".

From the "History of the Great Western Railway" by E E MacDermot. "Reading Station itself was the first - and was destined to be the last survivor - of the quaint one-sided stations which Brunel designed for certain towns lying wholly or mainly on one side of the railway; this happened in each case to be the south. The Up and Down platforms were practically separate stations side by side a short distance apart on the south or Down side of the main lines, each on a separate loop, the Up station being the nearer to London. The advantages of this plan were that passengers had not to cross the rails, and the non-stopping trains ran clear of the station; while the disadvantages were that Up stopping trains crossed the Down main line twice, and also crossed the Down platform loop in entering the Up station, so that only one train at a time could be admitted, and no Down train could pass while an Up train was coming in.....Two or three years experience at Reading and Slough proved satisfactory to the Engineer at any rate, and similar one-sided stations were established at Taunton, Exeter, and Gloucester".

Reading Station was opened on Monday 30 March 1840 for public traffic and was, for a short time, the terminus until Monday 1 June 1840. The present station largely dates from 1899 when the last section of the quadrupling of the line from Didcot to Paddington was completed at Reading. The Italianate frontage with its familiar clock tower dates from about 1870.

When it is realised that the 1899 modernisation of the 1840 increased the number of platforms to 10 from a virtual one, the chaos at Reading from about 1850 onwards, when traffic increased enormously, can easily be imagined. It became one of the standing jokes of Victorian railway travel like getting lost at Crewe.

The summer of 1957 saw more developments in the Modernisation Plan for the railways.

The big event was the handing over on 2nd June 1957 of the first of British Railways "pilot scheme" main line diesel-electric locomotives at the Vulcan Foundry, Newton-le-Willows. Numbered D8000 it was a 1,000 hp locomotive built by English Electric and their associates, Vulcan Foundry, and was to be the first of 20 for the London Midland Region.

Also in June the first stage of diesel electification of the London - Tunbridge Wells - Hastings service was completed with the introduction of four diesel electric units, the first of ten for the first stage of the Hastings scheme. The underframes of these units were of BR standard construction from Ashford Works. The bodies were from Eastleigh and Ashford Works and were built to the restricted loading gauge for the Hastings Line.

Further new stock delivered were a batch of three car diesel multiple units built by the Birmingham Railway Carriage and Wagon Co Ltd for the London Midland Region, and more three car units from Derby Works for Western Region suburban services from Birmingham Snow Hill and Moor Street.

In Ireland 24 new diesel railcars entered service on the Great Northern Railway of Ireland. Constructed by Dundalk Works on frames supplied by Park Royal Vehicles Ltd they were fitted with AEC engines.

A very significant event locally, however, was the first of very many closures of railway lines in the area. On Saturday, 29th June 1957 the last passenger train ran between Princes Risborough and Watlington hauled by pannier tank No 4650 and formed of one ex GWR 3rd class corridor coach carrying on its last journey around 70 people. Freight services to Watlington were to survive for another four years.

Other news from the summer of 1957 was that inflation was hitting BR restaurant car prices. A four course lunch was increased in price to 9/6d (47½p) and afternoon tea up from 2/6d (12½p) to 3/- (15p). A cup of coffee went up to 9d (4p).

A Committee of Ministry of Transport and British Transport Commission officials reported that experiments should be made with Continental lifting barriers at level crossings, rather than the traditional wooden gate. Before this could go ahead it would need the repeal of an 1845 Act of Parliament.

June 1957 was the centenary of the opening of the Crunlin Viaduct on the Taff Vale Extension of the Newport, Abergavenny and Hereford Railway. The total length was 1,658 feet and greatest height 208 feet. By 1957 there was an 8 mph speed limit but the line was still considered by "Trains Illustrated" to be "a busy and important line".

New locomotives to BR stock in mid-summer 1957 were sixteen 0-6-0 diesel electric's; two class '5' 4-6-0's; two class '4' 4-6-0's; four class '4' 2-6-0's and four class '9F' 2-10-0's.

There are more railway bridges across the Thames than any other river in the UK. Of the 22 bridges the GWR built the most with 10 but the LSWR were not far behind with 7.

The earliest and certainly the most famous is, of course, that built in 1838 at Maidenhead by Isambard Kingdom Brunel. The story of it is too well known to repeat. When in 1892 the bridge was widened to accommodate 4 tracks the GWR engineer Sir John Fowler decided that he could no better than follow the original design. It is certainly the most handsome bridge on the Thames and many would say in the world. It has a further claim to fame as the setting for Turner's painting "Rain, Steam and Speed on the GWR" which was first exhibited in 1844.

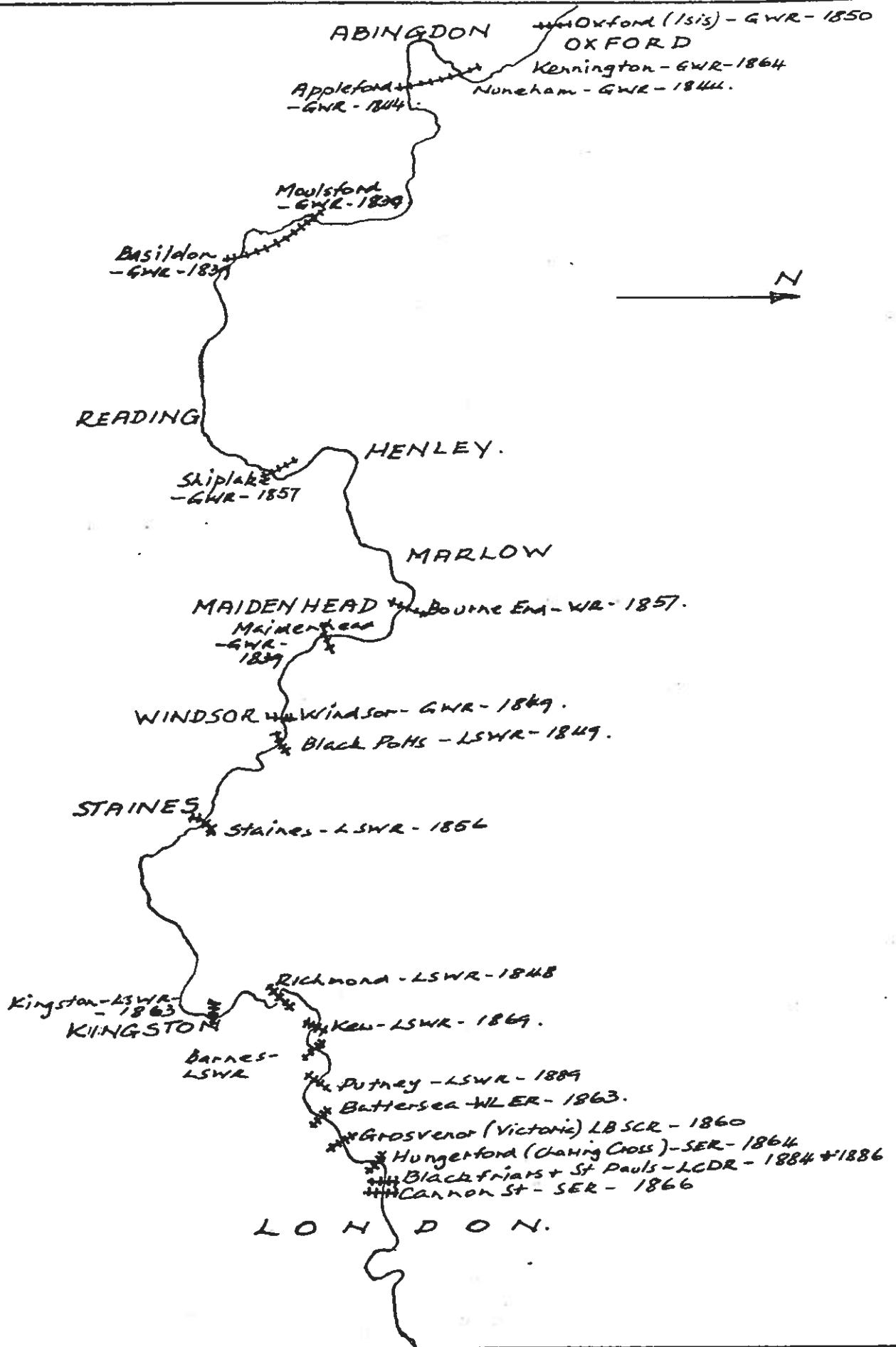
Our own local bridge at Bourne End and also that at Shiplake on the Henley Branch were designed by T H Bertram who was Brunel's assistant and later successor. Not surprisingly, knowing Brunel's methods for secondary bridges they both started life in 1857 as wooden trestles. The Bourne End bridge only lasted until 1870 when it had to be rebuilt, again in wood. The present bridge dates from 1894 and took less than 6 months to complete. The Shiplake bridge was completely replaced in 1897 and with its cast iron pier cylinders it bears a remarkably resemblance to that at Isis (Oxford) which isn't unexpected as it was also rebuilt in 1897. Bourne End also has cast iron pier cylinders but differs in that it has lattice work girders.

There hasn't been a bridge built in this century, although many have been entirely reconstructed. The last to be built was St Paul's in 1886. This, together with Blackfriars has an unusual history in that they both started life as separate bridges but in 1937 St Paul's ended by being merely an extension to Blackfriars. St Paul's was originally built to serve a new station to be built by the LCDR but it never came to be. An assistant in the design was H M Brunel following in his famous father's footsteps.

When the GWR, via Slough, and the LSWR, via Staines, were competing to enter Windsor they had to pay an unusual price for doing so. This arose because Windsor was in need of road improvements below the castle and also the road bridge to Datchet was in need of replacement. To obtain approval for their plans the GWR paid £25,000 and the LSWR paid £60,000, and Windsor got its road improvements and bridge.

Indirectly the Isis Bridges at Oxford were involved in the moves that led to the downfall of the broad gauge. In 1843 the GWR had obtained authorisation to build from Didcot to Oxford and as a result thought of extension to the Midlands. The extension led to the "Gauge War" and subsequently to the Gauge Act 1846 which laid down that all future railway lines in GB were to be 4ft 8½ins.

(Since writing this piece I have come across a very recent book "Thames Crossings" written by Geoffrey Phillips and published by David and Charles which deals not only with bridges but also tunnels)



RAILWAY BRIDGES  
OVER THE RIVER THAMES

Scale: one inch equals  
six and half miles about

June 1980  
SGV

The Somerset and Dorset as a railway has always fascinated me ever since I was regularly travelling on it in the mid 1950s from Broadstone to Sturminster Newton with the very occasional run through to Bath. During the whole of its life there was only one major accident on the line and on almost the same spot 60 years afterwards what was probably one of the funniest accidents, not to those involved, in the history of railways.

During the railway fever of the 1840s there were two schemes which had the intention of joining the Bristol and English Channels. Neither of them got off the ground and the S & D which finally achieved the object certainly did not start off with that intention. In fact the S & D started life as two railways the Somerset Central and the Dorset Central.

The first line to see the light of day was the Somerset Central and this began in a very modest way when they built in 1854 a line from Glastonbury to Highbridge (see map on page 10), with the object of enabling central Somerset to have an outlet to the sea. The Dorset Central was formed with a similar idea but to the English Channel. This was in 1855 but almost immediately afterwards the two companies had talks to form a joint line to link the two Channels and this was soon agreed. The first part built by the Dorset Central was from Wimborne to Blandford in 1850 but before this the Somerset had built the Glastonbury to Wells branch. 1862 saw the formal merger of the two companies. In the following year there was a continuous line from Highbridge to Wimborne thus joining the two Channels.

From 1863 onwards there were no further extensions until 1874 when the S & D opened the line from Evercreech to Bath which financially exhausted the non too robust company and as a result the Midland and the LSWR too a 999 year lease of the line in 1876.

It was the rundown nature of the S & D which led to its most serious accident in 1876 the same year as the leasing took place.

Before telling of the accident it is necessary to know a little of the signalling practice in 1876 concerning single lines, which the S & D was for the whole of its length, and also about the working arrangements on the S & D. The Board of Trade insisted that only one engine should occupy a single line section, and this was a length between two crossing stations. The method of working on the S & D was by each crossing station authorising by a ticket that an engine could proceed to the next crossing station. Each crossing station was in telegraphic contact with each other with one exception and also with central control in Glastonbury. The one exception, of course, comes into the story of the accident.

The two crossing stations involved were Wellow and Radstock but between them was a block post known as Foxcote. This blockpost was illegal and was there so that two engines going in the same direction could occupy the line between Radstock and Wellow. The telegraphic arrangements between the three



points was rather odd. Radstock and Wellow could only communicate with each other through Foxcote, although the latter was not in direct touch with central control.

The next unusual feature was the ages of the three railmen in charge at the three points. At Radstock the telegraph clerk was 18; at Foxcote the signalman was only 15 and was so weak that it was known he could not pull the signal properly; at Wellow the clerk was again only 15. All of them were expected to work a 14hr day, and the day of the accident August 6 was no exception and being a Bank Holiday all of them had in fact worked 15 hours at the time of the accident.

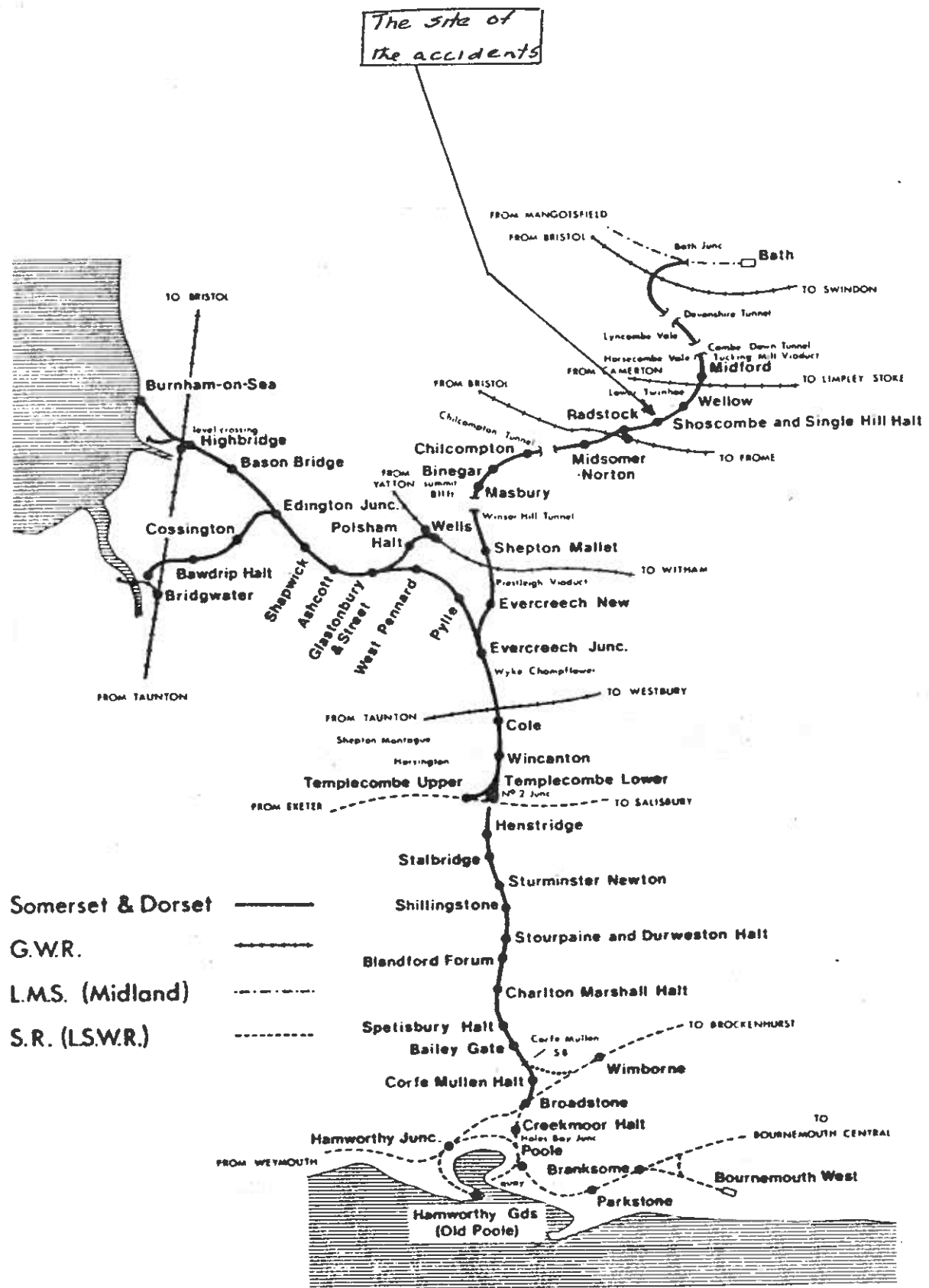
During the Bank Holiday no fewer than 17 extra trains had been run and the control centre had been experiencing trouble all day with maintaining control especially over the newly opened Bath to Evercreech section. The two trains involved were both extras. The first was an additional to the regular Bournemouth to Bath and left Wimborne at 6.10pm. The other was the return part of an excursion to Bath from Evercreech. The Bath train had been due to leave at 9.10pm but did not get away until 10.20. From the time the Bath train left, central control did not hear of it again until the accident had happened. Their knowledge of the whereabouts of the Wimborne train was only a little better.

The incident that caused the accident can only be put down to a complete loss of memory on the part of the boy at Wellow station. He first let the Bath train leave Wellow without informing the block station at Foxcote. Then 6 minutes later he accepted the Wimborne train from Foxcote. One minute later the inevitable happened and the two trains crashed and as a result 13 died, of whom 12 came from Radstock.

Sixty years later there happened one of those accidents which has grown in the telling and strangely it took place within yards of the previous accident. The scenario starts when a goods train ran through signals which were set at red. The driver and fireman seeing that they were bound to hit an engine which was doing some local shunting decided to jump off but before doing so shut off. The driver of the shunting engine saw all this happening and as the speed of the goods engine was decreasing rapidly, he decided to reverse his own, to then jump down and board the goods train. Unfortunately the shunting driver forgot to tell his own fireman of his intentions, so when the driver jumped so did the fireman as he feared the worse. The shunting driver managed to board the goods but only to see his own engine gathering speed in reverse and no one on it. The engine, with 5 wagons, only finally came to a halt at Midford some 5 miles away, by which time it had demolished several sets of level crossings gates, Midford station and Midford signal box.

Sadly, today nothing remains of the lines of the "Slow and Dirty" as the S & D was known with love and affection.

# THE SOMERSET and DORSET JOINT RAILWAY



With acknowledgements to "Somerset + Dorset Rly" by Judge & Potts, Pub: OPC also "Red for Danger" by L.T.C. Roll.