

Isle of Wight Idyll - 1955 to 1967

The Isle of Wight seemed to be our generally favoured holiday destination in my schooldays; we went there in 1955, 1958 and 1961, then every year from 1963 through to 1967.

For our first visit we stayed at Bembridge, which even then had lost its little branch railway service two years previously, so on arrival from the mainland by paddle steamer at Ryde Pier Head we fought shy of the train bound crowds, instead boarding the little pier tramcar.

This British Railways owned four wheeled, petrol powered buggy and its

trailer (pictured right, in 1963) duly clattered and bucked along the pier to deposit us and luggage onto the esplanade.



Hereabouts stood waiting a very assorted array of multi-coloured vintage buses and coaches, their intended functions indicated by means of handwritten paper labels stuck inside the windcreens. Our allotted steed was a Seaview Services Bedford OB type, which proceeded to whine and groan its way through narrow country lanes to the holiday camp.

I got to see very little of the Islands' operational railway system on that first visit, but recall exploring around the old Bembridge station site, with its prominent and lavish brick built station house, ornately gabled and with already somewhat woebegone wooden platform canopy. Remarkably this survived in a state of increasing dilapidation for a further eight years or so (right, also in 1963) before being demolished and replaced by a marina and housing development.

The track had all gone, and the space created was intended as a car park, though extremely muddy and little used - a sign of things to come at many other closed station sites!



Our next island holiday was spent at Sandown in September 1958, and we came down by the conventional mainstream rail – ferry - rail route, with all the crowds. From our local station of Staines Central the first leg of our journey was by tedious route 28 electric (rear portion) to Guildford via all the stops to Aldershot and back. We transferred into a 12-car "Nelson" electric rake (headcode 80) for the run down through Petersfield, Liphook and Liss to Portsmouth Harbour. These trains comprised all corridor stock built by the Southern Railway in 1936 specially for the route and always associated with it. The standard formation was of three four car sets designated 4-COR which had a very distinctive "one eyed" frontal appearance caused by the need to offset the route indicator stencil allowing for the through gangway connection. There was thus only one cab front window instead of the normal two in the outer ends of the motor coaches, which had open saloon seating. The two intermediate trailers did not match the external style of the motor cars at all, having a corridor with somewhat larger windows on one side and individual compartment

doors on the other. Some faster trains making fewer stops comprised only two 4-COR units together with a 4-RES set, usually but not always in the centre of the rake. This comprised the same motor cars as the 4-COR but had a restaurant kitchen car and an open first class only saloon in place of the compartment trailers. One felt very self-conscious struggling with luggage through this elite sanctum in the course of trying to find good seats in the "ordinary" part of the train!

On arrival at Portsmouth Harbour station, where the surging sea was somewhat disconcertingly visible through gaps in the girders between the platform and tracks, we decanted directly into the waiting ex Southern Railway paddle steamer "Ryde" tied up alongside for the half hour crossing to the island, packed solidly with a full load of holidaymakers and luggage. A quick glance in our "News Chronicle" newspaper ascertained that we were not likely on this occasion to encounter any of the famous Ocean Liners at close quarters on their way into or out of Southampton at this time; these events were reported daily then and we were able to identify several such fine vessels from the beach during the course of our stay. For me, a highlight of our Solent crossings in the 1950s was to be taken down a narrow stairway into the bowels of the paddle steamer to see the engine room, out of bounds to the travelling public, but normally accessible on polite request to one of the smartly uniformed crew. Down here was a galaxy of reciprocating polished steel, gleaming brassware and varnished wood cladding, in an atmosphere of uncomfortable heat accompanied by hissing steam and the smell of hot oil. The engines were remarkably smooth running and quiet, the dominant sound being the continuous distant thunder like rumble of the paddle wheels churning through the water outside. Up on deck again, we cut a broad white foamy swathe across the Solent millpond, venturing close to one of the grim sentinel fortresses of Spithead, and rocking gently as the more modern motor screw ferry "Brading" passed us going flat out back to Portsmouth.

As the Island hove near, we swept round in a graceful wide arc to draw alongside Ryde Pier Head, pursued by a bevy of squawking seagulls, just as sister paddle steamer "Whippingham" was drawing away having disgorged its load. The pier stretched away into the misty distance of the foreshore, with Ryde's white houses arrayed in neat terraces beyond. About halfway down the pier a tiny red train eased along silently, its engine trailing a white plume of steam against a clear blue sky. This was going to be a perfect holiday!

Reality returned at the foot of the steep wooden gangplank, where we joined a vast throng of holidaymakers with their luggage which stretched as far as the eye could see in all directions. The sun blazed overhead as we sat on our cases, got up, shuffled along a few yards, and sat down again. Eventually we piled into a packed Ventnor line train and were lucky enough to secure seats in one of those peculiar former SE&CR carriages where the lavatory cubicle had been converted into additional, somewhat cramped passenger accommodation. This was accessible only from the adjacent conventional compartment by clambering over other peoples' suitcases, so had been overlooked by most of the other passengers in their scramble to get aboard. The seats were arranged along one side only of this half compartment, so we travelled jauntily down to Sandown staring at a blank partition.

In the course of this stay, I was initiated into the rites of regular train spotting, at the grand age of ten years; starting with the simple two digit numbers of the Island locomotive fleet, a goodly haul from this compact system was easily possible. I recorded neatly in a new shiny red covered Woolworths pocket notebook my first twelve of the sturdy O2 class 0-4-4 tanks, all named after local towns and villages, plus a solitary example of the LB&SCR E1 class goods tanks, no.4 "Wroxall", a type soon to vanish altogether, which was fussing around shunting ancient wooden bodied coal wagons in weed infested sidings at Sandown station. We saw the passenger trains forging up the gradient past Lake towards Shanklin, and encountered derelict Alverstone station, on the Newport to Sandown line closed early in 1956, in the course of a long country walk undertaken as a change from the beach and the challenges of Brown's Pitch and Putt Golf Course. Here it is in 1963, even more derelict.....



Our August 1961 visit was the first of several based on West Wight, staying on this occasion at Fort Warden holiday camp, above Colwell Bay near Freshwater. Getting there involved a proper main line steam train journey, though the start from home was more complicated as we chose to avoid the trek into Waterloo and out again. First came the short hop round from Staines to Weybridge on the route 18 electric, then crossing over the four track main line by the footbridge for another short electric run to Woking. This bit was interesting then, passing the overgrown site of the former Brooklands motor racing circuit, a

mosque, and the impressive edifice of the Southern Railway children's home, all on the down side. At Woking we had a short wait before boarding the Bournemouth bound stopping train out of Waterloo, comprising a short rake of Bullied green painted corridor stock hauled by grimy standard class 5 4-6-0 "Maid of Astolat". Unexpectedly for a summer Saturday this was half empty, so we had a comfortable journey with a compartment to ourselves, albeit at a slow pace with frequent stops which enabled me to take in the sights of this unfamiliar route. In extensive sidings after the tunnel at Micheldever there was row upon row of decrepit, condemned carriages mainly in green livery, but some also in the old red or red and cream, and including a couple of ancient wooden bodied Pullman cars looking very forlorn with most windows broken.

The Winchester stop gave a brief glimpse of little B4 tank 30102 lurking in the shadows of the goods shed. On restarting from here, I looked out eagerly for a Western Region DN&S line Southampton bound train waiting for the road at Shawford Junction (they always seemed to be held up here by the S.R. signalman!) hoping it would be headed by "City of Truro" which I had heard was often used, but there was no train here now and the rails looked overgrown and neglected. Passing Eastleigh works, a couple of the graceful T9 4-4-0s were stored awaiting disposal, not the same ones that were there on the occasion of our works visit the previous April, also several King Arthurs I had not seen previously.

Unfamiliar ugly USA tanks and a solitary Brighton E2 tank 32102 were busy in the sidings leading to the Docks lines beyond Southampton Central, where the easily identifiable red funnels of the liner "Queen Mary" were visible towering above the ocean terminal buildings in the distance.

After our usual sandwich lunch, we left the train at Brockenhurst, deep in the heart of the New Forest; it duly shuffled off very smokily on the final leg of its run to Bournemouth. We had some time to spare to look around this pleasant country junction station, and found a couple of Q class 0-6-0s and an M7 tank pottering around in the extensive sidings. A further M7, 30379 appeared shortly, heading up three very plain ex L&SWR "Ironclad" former main-line corridor coaches forming the branch train to Lymington Pier, which we boarded just before departure time.

Once under way, the driver slowed down to a crawl after about a mile to pick up the token at Lymington Junction signal box then bore off left onto the single track of the branch proper, dropping rapidly away from the main line striding westwards across the bare heathland. This was at that time still a complex three way divergence, as the double junction leading to the original "Castleman's Corkscrew" route avoiding Bournemouth to the north was also intact and in use.

An unproductive brief call was made at Lymington Town's short, single platform then the little train squealed and clattered over an iron bridge and round sharp curves following the foreshore, over a very broad road level crossing leading to the motor-car ferry slipway, to come to rest beneath the long and draughty awning of Lymington Pier station. The transfer from train to ferry was far quicker and more civilised than at Portsmouth, this route always being much quieter than those to the east Wight resorts even on a high summer Saturday. The last few cars and lorries plus one coach were ushered aboard the modern looking motor screw vessel then the chain operated stern loading ramp was raised noisily; we slipped away almost imperceptibly for this somewhat longer Solent crossing of some 45 minutes. More than half of this time seemed to be spent

negotiating the sinuous twists amongst mudflats of the Lymington River channel (these boats had the benefit of side thrusters, and were thus very manoeuvrable), and very little on the open sea itself. As we left Lymington Quay behind so also did the little branch train, heading back almost empty to Brockenhurst and the main line for another lengthy layover and a new load.

The docking of our ferry on the other side was a somewhat abrupt affair, a choppy sea thumping the vessel heavily against the well bruised timbers of the small quay in the shadow of Yarmouth Castle walls.



A short distance away on Yarmouth Quay, across an expanse of open tarmac a huddle of buses and coaches, some in "National" green and cream livery and others of various private operators, waited for their straggling passengers. We boarded a shiny new Southern Vectis Bristol "Lodekka" on route 12 for Freshwater Bay, and found very ample luggage space and plush seats for the final leg of our somewhat varied journey; up over the narrow wooden bridge of the Eastern Yar River and down the main road with overhanging trees brushing and thumping along each side of the top deck, to alight at Colwell Common.

West Wight seemed to be managing very well without its railway, and a couple of days later I found out why. The villages of Totland and Freshwater form a widely dispersed community, then just as now, but the little terminus of the erstwhile Freshwater Yarmouth and Newport Railway was well out of it all, beyond the last of the shops and houses, round a couple of bends in the lane, astride a country road junction in the middle of nowhere. The buses in contrast served the whole area most comprehensively and efficiently.

Eight years after closure, the old Freshwater station, a derelict red-brick main building with peeling S.R green and white painted woodwork and a single platform much extended using still pristine 1930s concrete prefabrications, slumbered peacefully in a cloak of undergrowth, in which rusty remnants of the old tracks remained intact. It was easy to see why it had to close. These two pictures show the station in happier days.....



The only other contact we had with the island railway system on this holiday was at Ventnor, at the end of a long and exhilarating ride by open topped white Bristol K series bus from Totland, down the full length of the Military Road via Blackgang Chine, still a favourite journey today. I finally managed to locate the Town station, after some difficulty, at the very top of a steep climb involving flights of stone steps and narrow twisting streets with hairpin bends. This inconvenient and somewhat mysterious terminus still retained its Southern Railway enamelled signware and paintwork; I explored thoroughly, including the curious caves cut directly into the cliff face then used for storage purposes by local coal merchants. A train of the lovely old wooden panelled LBSC and SEC carriages, by now all repainted into standard Southern green livery, burst out of the single track tunnel under St. Boniface down, arriving from Ryde; the driver surrendered the token to the signalman as it clattered over a three way point just in front of the tunnel mouth.



The engine was quickly detached and ran forward into the short shunting neck at the far end of the layout, where the tanks were topped up from a hydrant. The fireman opened up the smoke box door and shovelled out a fair quantity of hot ash onto the ground nearby. Servicing completed, the engine made an unnecessarily spirited but impressive dash down the run round loop to back onto the other end of its train. Here it simmered gently in the sunshine for some time, while a few passengers made their way from booking office to carriages via a curious narrow wooden gangplank which had been swung into position between the main and island platforms; for some reason the train had been brought in over at the far side of the latter, even though the main line was unoccupied. I thus added one solitary O2, no. 29 "Alverstone" to my tally of Island locos that year before meeting up with my parents and retiring to the Ailsa Craig tearooms opposite the station forecourt for afternoon tea.



Filling in the remaining gaps in my spotting book had to wait until August 1963, when we returned via the Lymington - Yarmouth route to stay at Scott's Bungalows, Colwell Bay, this time in the company of school friend Paul Chamberlain with his sister Judith and their parents. While the others were on the beach, Paul and I had determined to comprehensively explore the whole of the Island railway system, both open and closed; the latter by walking the full length of all the former routes in turn and photographing what we hoped would be the plentiful remains of all the stations.

The first disappointment came on the balmy summer evening of the day of our arrival, when we walked around the final bend of the lane leading to Freshwater station to be confronted not by the expected derelict buildings of two years previously but by a brand new factory premises, "Acorn Springs"! It was thus some years before I was able to obtain from another enthusiast a good photograph of this station as a memento of my previous visit. We quickly located the old track bed at the rear of the new building then strode briskly and

easily past Causeway Crossing and out along the eastern shore of the River Yar back to Yarmouth. Although the rails had been removed here as long ago as 1957, this part of the route was clear and well defined, and we conjectured as to the possible sites where the incredible proposed "Solent Tunnel" rail schemes of Victorian times might have surfaced to join our route.

The small brick buildings and short platforms of Yarmouth station (pictured right) were still intact, that of the passing loop having been out of use since 1926, but again inconveniently situated towards the back of the town.

We returned to Colwell Bay by the familiar no. 12 bus as darkness fell, eager to get started on the main part of our explorations the next day.



Then came the second setback, as the Sunday morning dawned wet and windy, in complete contrast to the preceding week or so, and track bed walking was clearly going to be very uncomfortable. Instead we joined a goodly throng of other dejected holidaymakers on a well steamed up Bristol K type double deck bus straight to Newport bus station, then made our way through the back-streets of the town to the commodious railway station. Here we purchased 6-day rail-rover tickets and introduced ourselves to that quaint mobile museum which comprised the working remnant of the Island railway system, some 28 miles of line to Cowes and Ryde, and thence down to Ventnor. Despite the appalling weather we quickly became addicted to the delights of its ancient rolling stock, none much less than fifty years old, and the varied architecture and layouts of the stations. That day we did a quick preliminary survey of the whole system, noting features of particular interest to which we might return

later in the week with hopefully better weather. Here are our pictures from that damp day.....



Loco no. 30 "Shorwell" enters Newport station from Ryde..... and after arrival at Cowes



Pausing at Mill Hill on the return journey, with one passenger alighting..... and passing Medina Wharf



Waiting at Newport to cross the next train from Ryde,

and then down to Ventnor with loco. 33



A stroll along Ryde Pier.....

and waiting for the Newport train at Esplanade





Passing the former Asheby station house.....



and running into Haven Street station

Monday morning did indeed turn out fine and settled, so we reverted to the track bed walking plan. Leaving our families we boarded the first bus into Yarmouth which was packed with talkative shoppers, with well provisioned duffle bags, the plan being to continue along the old Freshwater line route hopefully to reach Newport easily that day. Unfortunately the going and our spirits deteriorated rapidly compared to that from Freshwater to Yarmouth, and we encountered extremely aggressive brambles and nettles, a waterlogged cutting, barbed wire barricades, an angry farmer and the quagmire of a piggery in the course of the three miles to Ningwood station, which took about 3 hours. After a rest and a drink in the hot sun, sitting on the edge of the grass grown former loop platform (right), we forged on eastwards.



The last vestige of enthusiasm for our grandiose plan to cover all 28 miles or so of abandoned route finally evaporated somewhere in the vicinity of the Cal Bourne viaduct, some four miles out of Yarmouth. The track bed here disappeared totally from view into a particularly vicious bramble thicket and it dawned on us that not only was the viaduct larger than had seemed possible from the insignificant mark on our Ordnance Survey map, but also that it had been comprehensively dismantled! Somehow we managed to scramble down to stream level, then there was no alternative but to take off our shoes and socks, roll up trouser legs and wade through the fast flowing stream. This operation proved somewhat more hazardous than anticipated and a careless stumble resulted in severe wetting of the nether regions, but I did at least manage to save our packed lunches from this ducking.



Worse was to follow, as it proved

impossible to regain the route of the railway on the far side, and we had to retreat northwards towards the main road via the river bank and a farm track, both of which contrived to deposit much clinging, oozing mud to our already saturated footwear and lower limbs. This unscheduled detour brought us eventually to Calbourne & Shalfleet station by road. The secluded and sinister looking facilities here (picture above) were moderately well preserved since closure ten years previously but bore evidence of recent occupation by the local chapter of "Hell's Angels", who, judging by the slogans daubed upon the walls were wont to indulge in somewhat nefarious activities within. We took the opportunity to clean ourselves up and dry out as far as possible, ate our lunch, and hoped that they would not be in any hurry to return home that day!



As time was now pressing we cheated on the next stage, boarding a convenient Newport bound bus at Barton's Corner, as far as the railway bridge at Gunville brickworks, where the track bed appeared to be in a much better state to continue our walk. Discovery of the remote little station we had missed, at Upper Watchingwell (picture right, which served only Swainston House) had to wait until a couple of years later.

Resumed progress eastwards was much easier, though Carisbrooke station (right) was a disappointment, being totally demolished.

However we were thwarted again on the approach to Newport, as the spindly steel Hunny Hill viaduct was also dismantled. Tramping the last half mile or so wearily by road, with blistered feet, there was not even the welcoming sight of a train to greet us on arrival at the station; we had just missed one in each direction.



We later sank into the plush seats of the no. 12 bus which whisked us very quickly back to Colwell Bay, and a long soothing dip in the cool sea cleansed and revived our spirits. We regaled our families with the tale of our initiation into the dubious pleasure of exploring old railways, techniques which were to be honed and improved over the years following, in the course of doing battle with nature and the elements in different parts of the country.

The weather the following day reverted largely to that of Sunday, but looking more set for the duration; our blisters were still painful, removing any lingering desire to repeat the experiences of the previous day. A substantial part of the rest of the week was thus spent using our rail rover tickets to the full on the open system, though we did venture along the easy-going couple of miles of route from Brading Junction to the former terminus at Bembridge, which had hardly changed at all in the eight years since I had last seen it. A slight detour was necessary at the intermediate station of St. Helens (right) whose



main building had been nicely renovated and extended as a private dwelling with a sunken garden on the old track bed. Just beyond, St Helens Quay was mainly derelict and grass grown, yielding little evidence of the former extensive sidings and facilities here, once used for trans-shipment of some of the Island's locomotives and rolling stock.

Here are the other pictures we took during that overcast week.....



At Newport; the carriage sidings



and a train approaching from Cowes

Condemned loco 25 "Godshill" was being shunted at Ryde St Johns Road workshops, prior to a further onslaught of the cutter's torch.....



Brading station, where we alighted for our walk along the Bembridge branch



A Ventnor train waiting to leave Sandown.....



and arriving at Shanklin station.....



Running round at Ventnor..... and calling at Wroxall on the return journey



On the Cowes train, passing the closed station of Whippingham. Leaving Newport station in the evening

For our by now annual visit in August 1964, my father had thoughtfully obtained from the Public Relations Office at Waterloo Station a trackside photographic permit for the Isle of Wight lines, subject of course to the usual indemnities. This had to be in his own name, as at 16 I was deemed too young to acquire one in my own right, but obviously I intended to accompany him at all times, and hoped that the authorities would overlook this detail. In the event, despite extensive use of the privilege over several days at most of the relevant locations, we were not once asked to produce the document for inspection or otherwise challenged in the course of our trespasses, nor indeed even given a second glance by most of the staff. This was well before the days of high visibility day-glo vests etc, now deemed essential for the safety and well-being of line side personnel!

The permit was our passport to venture with confidence to several interesting sites not accessible from the public parts of the system, such as Ryde St Johns locomotive yard, running shed and workshops, the extensive Newport layout, and Medina Wharf, out on the line to Cowes.

The one I still have (left) is dated 1965-66, whereas the pictures are definitely 1964, so I think we must have had these permits for two years running.

We had observed two little halt platforms on the Newport to Cowes line, not advertised in the public timetable, but at which trains would occasionally stop, presumably on request. Having advised the guard of our intentions at Newport, and travelling in

B.R. 6621/25

N^o 907 BRITISH RAILWAYS BOARD
SOUTHERN REGION

Permit Mr. L. A. JAGGERS
to enter upon the British Railways Board's premises
between ISLE OF WIGHT LINES

(excluding Tunnels, Viaducts, Long Bridges, Depots & Works) for the purpose of taking photographs
from the 18th day of AUGUST 1965 to
the 17th day of AUGUST 1966
subject to the approval of the Board's Police and Officials
and to the conditions printed on the back hereof.

Issued by R. D. Y. FAULKNER R. V. ROBERTS D. McKENNA,
Signature of Holder General Manager.

the leading coach behind the engine as bidden, we were duly deposited on the wooden boards of Cement Mills Halt a few minutes later (picture right).

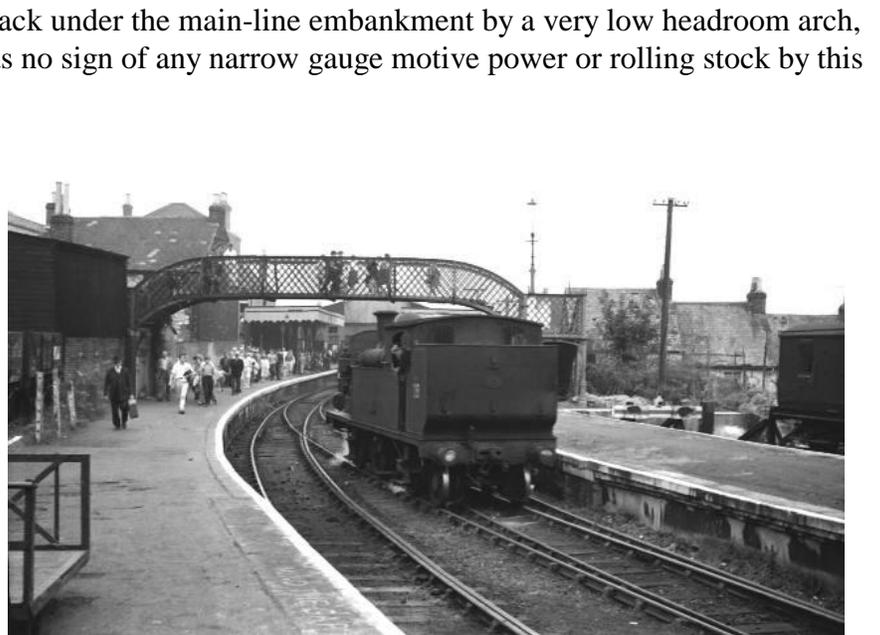
This short platform was by then patronised only by the occasional angler as the mills themselves were long defunct; they were served by a still extant siding which disappeared into the undergrowth off the running line, access obtained by a ground frame situated at the foot of the platform ramp. Traces of a narrow (about 3-foot) gauge railway system were evident within the works area, with a spur leading back under the main-line embankment by a very low headroom arch, to a quarry pit on the farther side. There was no sign of any narrow gauge motive power or rolling stock by this time.

Exploration complete, we hailed the following Cowes bound train with the approved hand signal; this screeched to a halt allowing us to board somewhat self consciously, scrutinised by numerous pairs of eyes popping out of windows down the length of the carriages: modern image railway services will never be like this again!

Arrived at Cowes, we watched as the engine completed its unusual run round manoeuvre, involving letting the coaches run down to the buffer stops under gravity controlled only by the Guard's handbrake, a somewhat hair raising procedure when encountered for the first time.

When this was seen to be safely completed, we had the brazen temerity to request a further interruption to the schedule to deposit us at Medina Wharf platform on the way back.

On this occasion we were not so lucky; peering anxiously out of the leading compartment window as we approached at some speed, the driver obviously caught sight of us and remembered our request in the nick of time. He then implemented a classic Isle of Wight style Westinghouse assisted full emergency stop with all wheels locked solid, but the train slid gracefully onward coming to rest with a sickening jolt, our compartment fully three coach lengths beyond the platform. We had to swing the door open wide and climb down to ground level using the thoughtfully provided grab rails and bogie footboards, to the great astonishment of our fellow travellers and



right under the bemused gaze of the elderly driver, who, to his credit, displayed commendable patience throughout.

There remained the problem of how to reach up and shut the heavy wooden carriage door, which caused further delay. We now knew why quite a lot of the island rolling stock seemed to have pronounced flats on all the wheels!



On our return some time later after photographing the extensive wharf sidings and installations, we were careful to calculate that we would be hailing a different crew to that which we had left, but no doubt message of our antics had by then been fed onto the staff grapevine at Ryde St Johns.

Track bed exploration in 1964 was limited to locating the tunnel portal south of Dean Farm on the Ventnor West branch (right), and after overcoming fear of the sinister gloom, echoes and resident bat population, proceeding to explore by the feeble light of a small hand torch until rounding the sharp eastward curve near the far end revealed dazzling daylight at last. There followed a pleasant walk along the dramatic cliff side section of the old route to reach St. Lawrence station, by then a well preserved private dwelling.

Here are some of the other pictures we took during our 1964 week, some with the benefit of the lineside permit. Firstly at Ryde shed; loco 30 has its smokebox door handle embellished with a traffic cone....



Activity at Ryde St Johns; a coal train has arrived from Medina Wharf, and is shunted into the shed yard....



Ryde Pier again....



and approaching Smallbrook Junction, Ventnor line to left, Newport to the right



Sandown station looking south, with the former Newport line at far right,



Wroxall looking north



Two views of Ventnor station from above the tunnel mouth on St Boniface Down



Back at Newport with a Ryde train leaving, about to cross the drawbridge, former Sandown line on right; and in the old Freshwater line yard, by now being used for storing condemned goods wagons.



Inside the old engine shed building at Newport, empty and derelict
Beyond the Medina drawbridge, the Ryde line (right) and former Sandown line (left) viaducts part company

By 1965 rumours of impending closure of the island railway system, and replacement of our beloved ancient locomotives and carriages were becoming too strong to ignore, though no one was quite sure exactly what would happen, or when.

We revisited the railway extensively during our holiday in July, with sustained excellent weather for a change, and now able to justify the expense of colour slide film at last.

Judicious planning from the bus timetable enabled visits to the remaining previously unseen closed stations, of which Ventnor West was nearly missed altogether; after a fruitless search in the general area indicated by my old O.S. map, I realised that the old station house had been cunningly incorporated into a new housing estate, surrounded by many new dwellings, the access road running down the route of the former railway line (picture below). Horryngford on the old Newport to Sandown line was by now also a pleasant private house (below right).....





This visit also marked my first venture into tape recording, using one of the new generation of battery powered portable reel to reel machines with 3-inch diameter tapes made by Philips (long before the days of compact cassettes!), with a suitably foam rubber wrapped microphone glued to the end of a wooden stick. This machine was an object of some curiosity as I lugged it around Sandown station, as they were not at all common at that time. A quick word with the crew of our waiting train advised them of my intentions, and they promised a sound spectacle to remember them by on the ascent of Apse Bank, duly delivered and captured for posterity from the front window of the leading carriage. This is where the foam and the stick came into their own, the former to reduce extraneous wind noise acting on the microphone, the latter enabling me to remain well within the confines of the compartment, protected from the onslaught of soot and hot coals ejected from the loco chimney.

On thanking the crew on arrival at Ventnor, I was invited up onto the footplate for the run round manoeuvre, which was carried out with similar gusto. After coupling up, the men disappeared for a quick brew leaving their steed simmering gently in the sunshine, punctuated by occasional bursts of activity from the Westinghouse pump to top up the air reservoir for the brakes. I got in close in the interests of obtaining as authentic a recording of the characteristic pulsating beat of the pump as possible, which resulted in both myself and the precious tape recorder being spattered with hot oil droplets! The pumps on some of the engines were fitted with thin metal covers to prevent such inconvenience befalling ordinary passing passengers, but they were not favoured by the crews as they prevented the administration of the hefty clout with a heavy spanner which was the time honoured way of freeing up a sticking pump piston!



USE BLOCK LETTERS		Date of weighing	27 AUG 1965
SENDING STATION		MEDINA WHARF (I.O.W.)	
PLACE WEIGHED			
NAME OF SELLER		Cornell Ltd	
DATE DESPATCHED		27 AUG 1965	
A/c. OF		Cornell Ltd	
To		BATES	
		VEN' NOR	
		P'GITE	
CONSIGNEE			
TYPE OF FUEL			
WAGON NUMBER	Load Cat.	SALE WEIGHT OF FUEL	
27836	H	2 T 12 C	
* ACTUAL TARE			
5 T 8 C			
* Where painted Tare is authorized, delete word "actual"			

Here are some of our other pictures from August 1965.....



A Newport-Cowes train crossing the trestle bridge near cement Mills Halt;



Shunting at Newport



A Ventnor train entering Ryde tunnel, with a variety of vehicles in the coach park;



Approaching Shanklin



Sandown station, exterior.



Ryde shed, with several locos already laid up

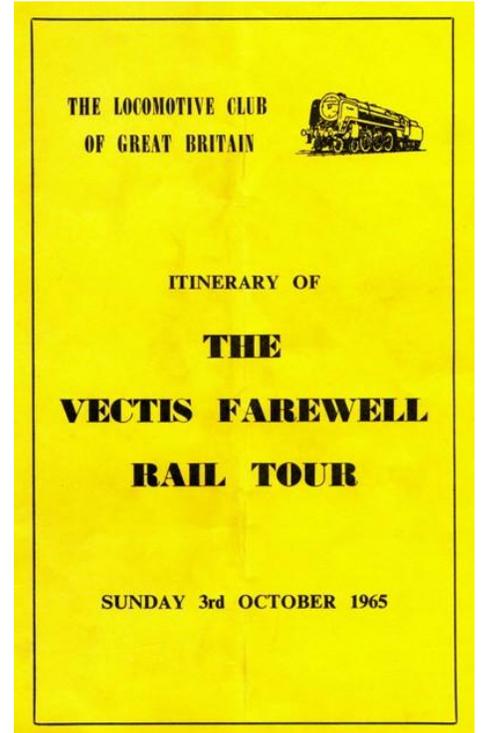
By now it seemed certain that the Shanklin to Ventnor section and the whole of the Cowes route from Ryde would close in October 1965, at the end of the summer season. On the third of that month we duly boarded the LCGB "Vectis Farewell" raitour train at Waterloo convinced that this was to be our very last opportunity to savour the delights of these lines and the old rolling stock.

Hauled by favourite unrebuilt West Country pacific no.34002 "Salisbury" we proceeded by a very leisurely and unfamiliar route through Epsom and Christ's Hospital, turning right at Arundel Junction to arrive at Chichester in mid-morning.





Here occurred one of those little detours, somewhat irrelevant to the main theme, so beloved of tour organizers around that period; while 34002 was taken off to be serviced, Q1 0-6-0s 33020 and 33027 (the former in quite uncharacteristic polished up black livery, the other coated in more typical grey grime) attached themselves one to each end of our train and ventured up to Lavant, the first station on the old line to Midhurst, and back.....



In the sidings again at Chichester, 34002 resumed its place and after a long, mournful blast on the whistle which carried over the adjoining fields, whuffed effortlessly off on its way in that manner which was so typical of the Bullied pacifics.

It was hereabouts, en route to Portsmouth Harbour, we learned on the grapevine that the Island branches were not, after all going to close that day, the last minute reprieve being due to claimed inadequacies of the proposed replacement bus services. It was obviously too late to abort the planned Island special train, which turned out to be an epic adventure much enjoyed by all participants, enthusiasm only slightly diminished by the knowledge that yet another trip was to be necessary at some unknown date in the future, should we still wish to be there at the very end.

First, a gleaming black but now unlined no. 24 "Calbourne", which had also lost its original heavy brass nameplates took us solus to Cowes and back, a very spirited and rousing effort with the six packed carriages (the normal trains on this line were of 4 coaches only).....



We were then treated to the rare spectacle of a double headed ride to Ventnor and back, with loco 14 "Fishbourne" (still lined, and with the proper nameplates) joining 24 in the pleasant autumn sunshine, stopping at Sandown and Wroxall for photographs on the way down.....





In the event, the Ryde - Cowes and Shanklin - Ventnor sections finally succumbed quietly during the winter cold of February 1966, witnessed mainly just by the local populace they had served for so long; a fitting and "private" farewell.

Our summer visit that year found only 2 or 3 engines in steam with the best of the old carriages shuffling dejectedly up and down from Pier Head to Shanklin, the old magic gone and the crews' spirit broken. These workings too expired during the following winter, the surviving Ryde to Shanklin stub being shut down for electrification. I was glad after all to have missed the various last rites, thus able to retain and treasure the images of that sunny day in October 1965 as my own personal farewell to the Island railway system, as had been intended.

So here we are in that last summer of steam working on the Island, firstly approaching Ryde St Johns, and waiting for the off there.....



At Shanklin, with the loco running round the train ready for the return journey.....



Having run empty out of the station, and shunted back into the up platform to load up, and passing the down train between Brading and Sandown.....



Meanwhile the rows of displaced old coaches lying derelict at Newport's former FY&NR station was saddening, and I wish I had not encountered them. Many of their windows had been smashed, doors hung open creaking in the breeze, seat cushions had been ripped open and their stuffing spilled fluttering from the door holes





There was obviously no hope for this lot (one of their number had been towed clear and set alight from end to end already), so I helped myself to one or two easily removable mementoes, gently lifting carriage maps and prints out of their shattered frames and attempting (but failing) to acquire a brass door handle stamped SE&CR on the back with the aid of a screwdriver hastily purchased from Newport Woolworths.

All but one of the locos had by this time been cut up where they stood, in the derelict platforms of the main station, and just a few

odd fragments of jagged and rusty steel plate and severed bolt heads were left scattered around to mark their demise. Only no. 24 "Calbourne" stood forlorn but intact at the head of a train of 4 or 5 carriages in good order obviously singled out for a better fate, but which at that time was still by no means assured.



Along the line to Ventnor (left) all was of course quiet and becoming rapidly overgrown.

Lifting of the track had started at Cowes, and the scrap rails were taken to Medina Wharf for loading aboard barges and return to the mainland. The return voyages conveyed new conductor rail for the forthcoming electrification of the Ryde – Shanklin section.....



For 1967, I just had to have a contemptuous look at the benefits which the BR modernization plan had brought to the bit of route they failed to get rid of altogether, and found the refurbished ex London Transport 1928 stock tube trains now decked out in gaudy blue and yellow livery, lurching and clattering their switchback way down to Shanklin.....

This stock was very familiar to us in its Piccadilly and Central line days, but we thought it to have



vanished long since; it was after all nearly as old as the steam stock it had replaced on the Island! It was perhaps quite well suited to the Ryde Pier railway, which became somewhat reminiscent of that at Southend, but looked totally incongruous out in the countryside. The cheapness of the electrification scheme resulted in over a foot difference in height between the low floors of the new trains and the original station platforms, totally unsuitable for elderly or infirm passengers or those accompanied by prams or bicycles; it was not until some years later that the track was raised in the stations to a more appropriate level.

The coach dump at Newport was even more depressing than the previous year, owing to the depredations of vandals and souvenir-hunters (like me!). Many of the coaches had gone, and one of the remaining number had been towed clear and set alight from end to end.....



That year for the first time we had taken our recently acquired car, a Morris Minor saloon, over to the Island, so not only had the trains ceased to serve, but the buses lost our patronage too, a sign of the times indeed!

Along the Ventnor line, the track was by now partially lifted at Wroxall, and the Ventnor station site was advertised as being for sale, this notice jokingly greeting intrepid visitors who had arrived by walking through the tunnel under St Boniface Down!.....



The Isle of Wight Steam Railway has of course been most successful in recreating the essence of the old system, though the constraints of preservation and tourism mean that this can never be totally convincing. On a warm, sunny afternoon however I can still sit on the platform at Haven Street station, close my eyes and re-activate privately those perfect balmy summer days spent upon one of Britain's last true Victorian style railway operations. These sample pictures were taken in 1977, the summer sun shining on a much brighter future.....



K. A. Jagers

1993