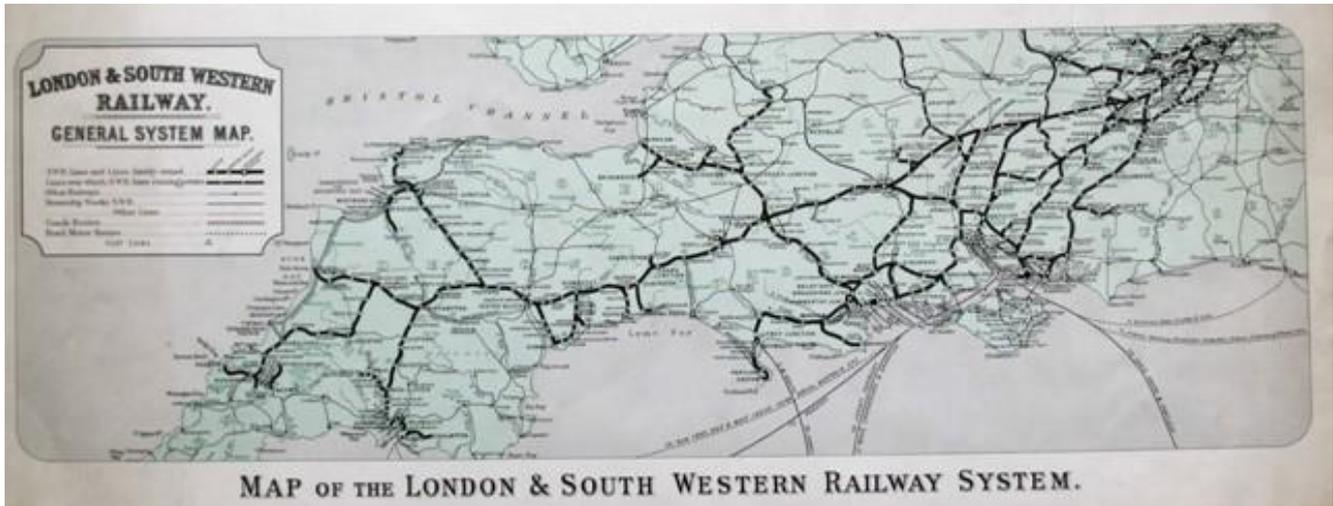


To "Strong Country" and beyond - by the Southern

In most of the alternate years when not visiting the Isle of Wight, our summer holidays were spent in the Southwest of England, and naturally we travelled by train. With the exception of Brixham in 1959 this was not by the traditional and well-publicised holiday route of the former GWR, but by Southern Region, which at that time extended all the way to North Cornwall. Unlike our Isle of Wight journeys, it was not practicable to join the main-line trains at Woking, so we began with the routine suburban ride up to Waterloo; boarding the "express" here, right at the start of its trip, made the adventure that much more exciting, with a true "long-distance" feel to it.

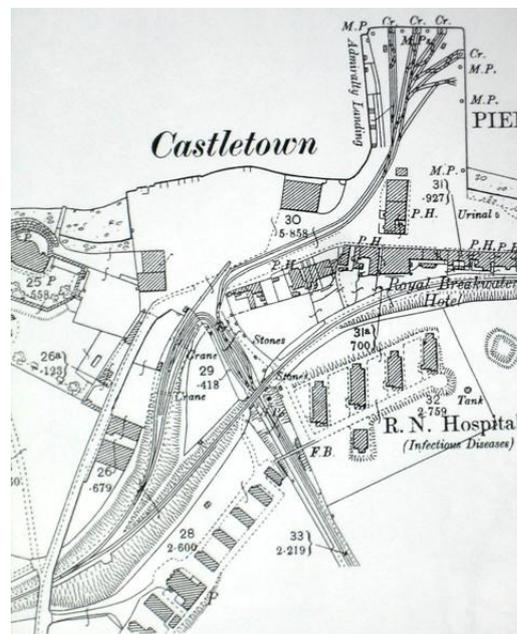


Weymouth - 1956

In August 1956 we went to Weymouth, but I can recall very little of the journey, which involved reversal in Bournemouth West terminus in both directions, and the unusual back shunt (most undignified for an "express" train) into the up platform at the old Dorchester South station on our way home. Our stay at Weymouth was in a holiday camp at the south end of Chesil Beach, overlooking the iron viaduct carrying the branch railway across from Melcombe Regis to the Isle of Portland. This little line had already lost its passenger service to Easton (since 1952) but we saw the short pick-up goods train crossing slowly every morning around breakfast time, headed I think by an O2 class 0-4-4 tank, from the large windows of the camp dining room. A wooden pedestrian footway accompanied the single track branch across the bridge. Our local walks explored the derelict station at Easton and the branch line running right round the south and east sides of the island, in deep cutting hewn from solid rock, then a ledge on the cliffside. There were some disused and very rusty quarry sidings. We found old stone-blocked tramroads and a gravity worked incline of 4 ft 6 in gauge with a partial 3-rail arrangement in the stone quarries themselves, which my father explained to me had been worked as penance by generations of prisoners.



Other outings were to Upwey Wishing Well Halt by Yeovil-bound GWR diesel railcar from Weymouth's elegant Brunel-style terminus station, even then somewhat knocked-about, and to Abbotsbury where the fine white portland stone station building remained derelict, necessarily by Hants & Dorset bus. An evening trip to explore Weymouth itself is remembered for the sight of little pannier tank 1369 fussing around on the quay lines with some covered vans; its crew included four burly gentlemen whose role became apparent at one point where a black Morris 8 saloon car had been left so that it obstructed the approaching engines' bulbous outside cylinders. The men were quickly deployed at each corner, and bodily lifted the offending vehicle a few feet to one side. Obviously such remedies were frequently necessary even in those days of relatively few cars!



Seaton - 1960

In August 1960 our holiday journey took us to Seaton in south Devon, by through carriage direct from Waterloo on a train which I felt must somehow have been related to the "Atlantic Coast Express" as this ran in so many confusing parts on summer Saturdays, but in fact was the un-named 10.45am for Lyme Regis and Seaton only. It comprised two rakes of five of the modern looking, green painted Bullied corridor coaches with their set numbers shown boldly in off-white at each end, and a buffet car right up front. We took up our reserved seats in the rear coach of the leading set early, and I went up to the very end of the narrow platform as our engine, a rebuilt "Merchant Navy", backed down with a couple of S.R. bogie utility vans for luggage (collected from an adjoining dock line) and coupled up. It was, as usual, just too far away beyond the platform ramp for me to record its number or name. A prompt departure heralded a fast non-stop run down to Salisbury, arriving just after 12.15.

Prominent features in those days were the large and beautifully painted lineside hoardings depicting a Southern pacific locomotive in original air smoothed condition (in early British Railways dark blue livery) which proclaimed "You are approaching/ entering/ now in the Strong Country" at several points along this route from around Woking onwards. They were a fine public relations exercise on the part of Strong's Brewery (based at Romsey), but I never could fathom the extent of their claimed territory as there did not seem to be any corresponding boards further west to denote the leaving of this exalted land! This splendid reproduction sign is at Alton, on the preserved Mid Hants Railway....



At Salisbury I had expected the "Merchant Navy" to be swapped for a light pacific, but it was not to be, and the station stop here occupied only a couple of minutes or so. Our journey restarted in fine style, but soon a very cautious approach was being made to Templecombe station, which allowed me to catch sight of some very unfamiliar engines in and around the Somerset & Dorset line yard below or waiting on the spur line leading up to the bay platform in the concrete Southern station, where we came to a stand at signals. I recorded 2-8-0s nos. 53804 and 53809 (the only 5-prefix numbers I ever saw) and LMS 2P 4-4-0 no.40634 here, as well as commonplace pannier 3737 and a couple of standard

76xxx class 2-6-0s. Despite all this activity no one detrained or boarded here (the timetable confirms that it was not a scheduled stop) and we were soon on our way again.

The guard came down the train checking carefully that everyone was in the correct portion for either Lyme Regis or Seaton as appropriate, and warning us not to venture into the other half of the train henceforth. I was disappointed not to catch a glimpse of any of the veteran Adams radial tanks at the Axminster stop; I knew from a recent "Trains Illustrated" magazine article that there should have been not just one but two of them there that Saturday, for the sole purpose of double heading the five coach portion of our train which was detached here, over the steeply graded line down to Lyme Regis. After a short wait, we pulled away westwards leaving the detached portion standing in the down main platform.

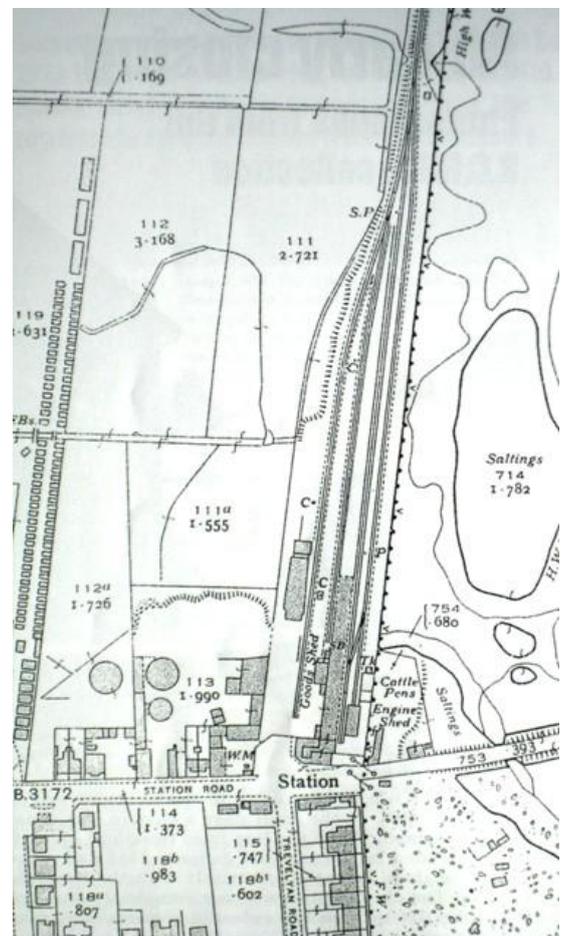
Again, there was no sign of the old locos, but I probably missed them by looking out on the wrong side as the geography of Axminster station was peculiar to say the least; I found out later that the branch came in on the north side, from the west, despite Lyme Regis being due south!

Our "Merchant Navy" now romped away with its much lighter load and within only a few minutes we were slowing along the length of Seaton Junction's down platform loop before coming to rest at the far end, where the luggage vans next to the engine were unloaded. This completed, the train restarted, pulled ahead for a few hundred yards to clear the branch junction, then stopped again. I peered out of the window along the graceful curve of the carriages to the engine now simmering gently at their head, basking in the warm Devon sunshine. Groups of men in shunters overalls appeared at both ends, but despite the fact that we were running some twenty minutes late the pace was unhurried and they seemed more intent on catching up with the local gossip, puffing away contentedly on their pipes, than rearranging our train for the trip down the branch line to Seaton. A class M7 tank loco buffered up with a noisy clang to the rear of our set, jolting us in our seats. A further period of inactivity ensued, with birdsong from the hedgerows being the predominant sound. This peace was shattered momentarily as an up express, another "Merchant Navy" at its head, bore down round the curve at the foot of Honiton Bank at high speed, running very freely, and rattling our carriage windows as it passed. Eventually we were jolted once more, this time in reverse, and our 5-coach Bullied set now rolled gently back into the branch platform, stopping to pick up a couple of local passengers; the buffet car and the vans had been left behind attached to the main line loco. The regular branch train, 2-car push pull set no. 603 of converted Maunsell main-line stock, stood engineless in a siding alongside. On receipt of the Guard's shrill whistle and green flag, our M7 barked away heartily round the curve away from the main line.

Unlike the Lyme Regis branch, it was downhill all the way and the little engine progressed briskly with its load down to Seaton, passing straight through the little halts of Colyton and Colyford before running along the extraordinary length of straight concrete island platform provided at the terminus when it was rebuilt by the Southern Railway in 1935-36.

Another M7, 30021, stood ready at the head of an identical set of 5 main-line carriages packed with holidaymakers and luggage in a bay line just across the platform, forming the 2.35 through working to Waterloo which was signalled out immediately we came to rest; this was indeed a busy branch! Our loco was detached and ran forward as we queued to leave the platform, thence across the loop points to pull up outside the adjacent single road engine shed, having its smokebox emptied of ash and taking on coal and water.

We made our way through the station yard, which was full of Southern National K and L-type double and single



decker buses absorbing their new load of visitors bound for various outlying destinations; our holiday camp was however just a short step down the road, and provided a good view of the activities down at the station for the duration of our stay. I noted our set of carriages being shunted across into the bay platform line, where they remained for the whole of the following week; the branch set then returned with 30021 to take up its normal service role and the spare M7, 30048, departed light engine, the extra Saturday workings now over.

Seaton station was a splendid exposition of S.R. concrete; as well as the platform facings, the engine shed and even the water tower were so constructed! The main station building quite resembled a 1930's "Odeon" cinema from the road approach. The engine shed was of unusual but clever design, having large doors in the back at roadway level, thus doubling up as a covered end loading dock facility. There was a tiny wooden signal box on the platform under the canopy, enabling operation by the station staff at quiet times.

As was now my regular custom, on the middle Saturday of our stay I persuaded my parents to let me venture out alone to observe the activity on the main line. My secret plan was to go to Axminster then down to Lyme and back, but the connections were so awful that this was not possible in any reasonable time; incredibly, there was no branch departure from Axminster between 1.55 and 4.30pm on Saturdays - the service was better during the week! Plan B was just to go to Axminster, thereby at least getting to see the Adams radial tanks. This was thwarted by my father, who decided that this journey was far too complicated for a 12-year old, and I was duly allotted only enough cash to go to Seaton Junction. I had already noted the 10.20am up through carriages leaving Seaton, the 5-coach set that had been there all week, behind a single M7 that had arrived light engine early on, then a pair of through coaches arrived just before 12, lightly loaded. Incredibly, the 12.05 branch train then departed for the junction doubleheader, with both M7's! I fumed impatiently through lunch, and was at last released to run down to the terminus clutching my duffle bag containing packed tea, notebooks and father's folding bellows Kodak 620 roll film camera, in good time for the 1.26pm departure. This was the ordinary weekday 2-car branch push pull set augmented by a very old panelled-body 10-compartment suburban coach reminiscent of those in the Isle of Wight, still in faded early-1950's plain red livery; motive power was now disappointingly only the single M7, 30048. Despite this, it was a very brisk ride, and immediately on arrival at the junction the whole train was shunted quickly into the siding alongside the branch platform. The other M7, 30021, was quietly simmering in the sidings to the west of the station. In the yard opposite wheezy 700 class 0-6-0 30327 was carefully rearranging rakes of dirty 6-wheeled milk tank wagons for the adjacent "Express Dairy Milk & Egg Depot".

The scene was now set for re-enactment of the arrival of the 10.45am Waterloo through train, the one we had travelled down on the previous week, but now running to time and dealt with very promptly. It



arrived behind clean unrebuilt West Country pacific 34006 "Bude", and ran straight through the station to come to a halt some way beyond. 30021 came onto the rear, coupled up and left for Seaton, this time taking the buffet car with the main train down the branch! No. 34006 was left with only a single bogie GUV luggage van at the far end of the layout. Shortly an up stopping train, the 1.10pm off Exeter Central, arrived behind Salisbury based King Arthur 30796 "Sir Dodinas le Savage", and then 34006 shunted its van right across on to the rear of its 3-coach Maunsell set in the up platform loop. I took a carefully prepared broadside shot of this elegant locomotive standing under the concrete footbridge as the van was uncoupled and unloaded.....



The quaint duplicated LSWR lower quadrant up starter signal arms dropped to clear on their tall lattice post and the "Arthur" got away very cleanly and smartly with its augmented load.

The branch train had meanwhile emerged from its siding and chuffed off empty back to Seaton; I would have loved to have witnessed the manoeuvring there, with three trains and two engines now occupying the very basic layout! 34006 and I were now alone for a quiet few moments, but soon followed by an unforgettable spectacle; the down "Atlantic Coast Express", a Merchant Navy with about 14 on for Ilfracombe and Torrington including a restaurant pair, thundered through on the down main, working very hard to build up maximum momentum for the stiff climb to Honiton. Hardly had the dust settled when the up "ACE", 11.45am off Bude and similarly composed, tore down the bank and through on the up main at very high speed.

Moments later, yet another portion of the down "ACE", the 11.15am for Plymouth, Padstow and Bude, pounded heavily by, obviously recovering from being signal checked. Almost as soon as its tail end had disappeared from sight round the bend, 34006 was started up and crossed back over to the down main, running light engine for Exmouth Junction shed light engine, its day's work completed.



At about 2.15pm, a down stopper of only 3 Maunsell coaches behind S15 4-6-0 30843 called, but no-one boarded or alighted (just as well, as there was no branch train in attendance!), and another "ACE", this time the 12.00 up Ilfracombe, flew by. Some minutes later, yet another empty down stopper arrived, behind a rather dirty "King Arthur" himself, 30453; this terminated here temporarily, in the down loop, explaining the poor patronage. The main lines were thus cleared for a further pair of expresses, the down one being for Exmouth and Sidmouth, and the up proclaiming itself as yet another "ACE", this time the 11.00am from far-flung Padstow, and the last of this exhilarating sequence. I reflected that all this activity had taken place in the short space of just on one hour since I arrived at the Junction!

Five minutes peace and quiet was ended with 30021 gasping and wheezing round the final curve of the branch, the buffet car transferred from the down train and the 5 coaches forming the 2.35 TC Waterloo departure off Seaton (combined from the 2 morning through arrivals) in tow, which must have been a tough climb up from Colyton. It ran straight through onto the down main and pulled up well beyond the station. The 1.45 Exmouth (4 Maunsell corridors - the Bulleids had obviously run out by now!) ran into the up platform loop behind rebuilt pacific 34096 "Trevone", and the M7 duly shoved the

Seaton contingent, full of bemused looking passengers, onto the rear, making contact somewhat violently. The "WC" got under way unsteadily, with much slipping and black smoke under the road bridge; 30021 retreated once more to the sidings. Further expresses passed, the branch train returned with 30048, shed its red makeweight coach in the siding, and departed again for Seaton as its normal 2-coach weekday formation. 30021 backed down onto the front of 30453 waiting patiently with its short train in the down platform; this incongruous rake then departed (still completely empty) as a stopper to Exeter Central, no doubt a convenient way of working the spare M7 back home to Exmouth Junction shed. It was pursued up the hill after a decent interval by rebuilt 34034 "Honiton" heading the daily Brighton-Plymouth through train.

After this more-or-less continuous parade of passing trains since my arrival the junction now lapsed into a relatively long period of inactivity, and I quickly became bored after exploring every inch of the public areas of this spacious country station, rebuilt by the Southern Railway in 1928 with new concrete platforms serving loops off the through main lines which now ran down the centre. It was one of those fondly recalled busy railway junctions in the middle of the countryside, not serving any appreciable local community, which were all but completely swept away during the 1960s, once their feeder branches had been deemed unviable by Dr. Beeching and his cohorts. Try sitting there now for a whole three hours without becoming just a little bit bored!

As the time for my return to Seaton approached, and nothing more interesting presented itself, I used up the last shot of my 8-exposure roll film on a general view of the station from the east end.....



Even as I took this, mogul 31843 hove into view under the footbridge labouring hard on an up van train, and something was obviously seriously amiss. Acrid, black oily smoke billowed from the vicinity of the left side motion, and as it passed me actual flames spouted forth. The crew seemed not to show the slightest concern, and their steed continued to be flogged hard under the road bridge and out of sight; I had heard of "hot boxes" but this was ridiculous!

I returned over the footbridge just as the signals cleared at last on the down main, and a minute or two later I was astonished to see Adams radial tank 30583 running through light engine, very gracefully and quite fast. It was there for just a moment then gone in a flash, with a glint and a chattering from its elegant old side rods. I well knew that these venerable machines were confined to the Lyme Regis branch, but had not read my "Trains Illustrated" article thoroughly enough to realize that the second engine used on the Saturday through trains, which had arrived on the branch in the morning, then stayed on for the following week, whereas the one which had worked the previous week was relieved in mid-afternoon to return to Exmouth Junction for servicing. This was the one I now saw, and I was furious that I had used up all my film!

After this major trauma it started to rain; the mid-afternoon Exeter- Templecombe stopping train arrived and left, 3 shabby Maunsell coaches behind King Arthur 30450 "Sir Kay", and another pair of expresses passed. S15 30842 drew to a stand with milk tanks from the Exeter direction, then propelled them back into the up yard to be shunted by a re-invigorated and steam enshrouded 30327, and departed light tender first whence it came. There was one last remarkable sight in store for me at around 4.30 - a long down train of mainly Gresley LNER stock (a refreshing change from all that Southern green!) paused briefly behind pacific 34109 "Sir Trafford Leigh-Mallory". Why, I have no idea; no one got on or off, and the branch train failed to attend. This full load of weary looking patrons was bound for Sidmouth and Exmouth, and my bulky green timetable retrieved from the depths of the duffle bag revealed it as having originated as long ago as 7.00am at Cleethorpes, augmented later in the morning at

Lincoln and Nottingham! The rain lashed down on the grey carriage roofs and steamed up windows as it pulled slowly away.

The branch train reappeared coyly and I boarded it just as my last "cop" of the day, 30799 "Sir Ironside" connected with a down stopper, 3 coaches which had been detached from the rear of the 1.00pm Waterloo express at Templecombe. A couple of passengers got out and joined me for Seaton, briskly away from the junction at ten minutes to five with 30048 in charge yet again. At the terminus the platform was deserted and the forecourt empty of buses when I detrained to walk dejectedly back to base, wet and bedraggled; another mostly delightful summer Saturday had come to an end!

A short word here about the bus services at Seaton in 1960. The Southern National company as successors to the Southern Railway in this area worked the following routes:

- 45 West Bay – Bridport – Lyme Regis – Seaton – Sidmouth
- 97 Seaton – Beer – Branscombe – Sidmouth
- 213 Taunton – Ilminster – Chard – Axminster – Seaton
- 46 Seaton Station – Everest Drive local service (from June 1960 to Sept 1961 only)

There was a small garage adjacent to the railway station. The local services were worked by the last pre-war Bristol J05G single-deckers, in the DODxxx registration series. Here is one of the breed, nicely preserved at the Winkleigh Museum, in the mid-1990s.....



Our journey home the following Saturday was uneventful, and again wet. Five Bulleid coaches, damp and uninviting after their period of storage, all windows well steamed up with condensation, formed the 10.20am Waterloo TC departure from Seaton's bay platform road, with M7 30045, which struggled manfully with its load up the 1 in 76 from Colyton. At the junction, we were shunted across onto the back of a waiting short train which had already arrived from Sidmouth Junction, a rebuilt pacific simmering at its head. The whole got away smartly and promptly towards Axminster, where I glimpsed 30583 again, on the Lyme Regis branch train, but another of the trio remained annoyingly unseen, parked on the loop behind its carriages. Extra station calls were made at Chard Junction and Templecombe, followed by the usual 5-minute Salisbury stop. An arrival at Waterloo about 10 minutes late just after 2pm prompted an anxious rush through the crowds for the 2.24 fast electric back to Staines Central and home.

Wadebridge - 1962

Our last West Country rail based holiday, before a long unbroken string of Isle of Wight visits, was in August 1962. The Southern lines in Devon and Cornwall were shortly afterwards to be transferred to the Western Region and run down rapidly, with total loss of character. How fortuitous it was then that we should travel at last by the genuine "Atlantic Coast Express", long greatly admired. Our destination was Tintagel, North Cornwall, reached via its railhead Camelford, most of the way along that very furthest flung of the "withering arms", the Padstow road. It was at the time briefly fashionable to take "midweek" holidays, usually Wednesday to Wednesday, in an attempt to ease the burdens of summer Saturday travel for all concerned; good discounts were to be had by those willing to make this break with years of tradition. We travelled comfortably up to Waterloo by the 9.46 fast electric, after the morning commuter rush, in good time to board the "ACE". Even midweek this still ran as two complete trains during August, the traditional 11.00 departure being made up of four separate portions

for Ilfracombe, Torrington, Exmouth and Sidmouth, with ours following at 11.05 comprising three self contained 3-coach sets for Padstow, Bude and Plymouth plus a restaurant twin set. We had to check carefully that we boarded the right part of the correct train - this was helped of course by the then current practice of each coach carrying very comprehensive destination roof boards, supplemented by paper labels pasted up on the door droplights. A "Merchant Navy" loco backed on, as usual just off the platform end, precluding close



inspection. Nearby, the 11.00 was made ready, with 35018 "British India Line" gleaming in the morning sunshine. Neatly lined up in adjacent platforms were the leading 4-COR unit of the 10.50 fast to Portsmouth Harbour and new interloper D6506 on the 10.54 to Salisbury; all three forms of motive power apparently well posed for an interesting photograph, which I tried from all possible angles but failed to achieve before the electric train started away and spoilt everything! Here are the remaining two, with the diesel driver relaxing for a few moments before he too was due out.....

One by one the platforms emptied, then it was our turn, heralded by shrill whistling and slamming of doors down the length of the platform. A fast run down to Salisbury and the usual stop ensued, the signal for my mother to distribute the packed lunches and thermos flask tea; we had a comfortable and quiet compartment to ourselves for the whole journey. Templecombe was passed sedately, giving an opportunity to observe the only examples of motive power in evidence in the S&D yard, a couple of LMS 4F 0-6-0s. Likewise Yeovil Junction; though we were not scheduled to stop there, the Yeovil Town motor train was lurking at the bay platform, headed by M7 30129 (this loco seems to have been a permanent fixture at Yeovil over very many years!) A quite unexpected sight here was GW pannier tank 3671, busy shunting goods wagons.

I now knew well where to look out at the brief Axminster stop, but was also aware that the old "radial tanks" had now gone from here (I had finally caught up with the other two during early 1961; one at Eastleigh works and the other with a special train at Staines). The Lyme Regis job was now in the hands of LMS 2-6-2T no.41318 for which I assumed drastic track modifications would have been necessary. Onwards we swept through a deserted Seaton Junction, so I could not confirm whether the M7's had met the same fate (I later read that they had not, remaining here until early 1963 and the Western Region takeover of lines in this area)

Speed was brought down to an obliging crawl past Exmouth Junction sheds on the approach to Exeter Central, and I noted that the Sidmouth and Exmouth branch lines M7 contingent had been usurped by a plague of the 413xx machines, keeping company with just one standard 2-6-4 tank, 80036. Also sadly absent were the graceful T9 4-4-0s which I had hoped to encounter on the mysterious lines west of Exeter; these had all passed on during the previous winter, superseded by characterless Southern Railway N class 2-6-0s. I suddenly realized that the old order really was now being swept away at an alarming rate, something that was to be expected from reading the notes and news in my magazines at home, but somehow not readily accepted as fact until seeing first-hand in the course of a long journey.

Exeter Central station work occupied some time, and involved a change of locomotive from Merchant Navy to unrebuilt West Country, also removal of the restaurant car set to the centre storage roads, where a couple of the ugly Z class 0-8-0 tanks fussed around.

Another pair of these brutes arrived shoving a few fully loaded, N-hauled ballast hoppers up the steep bank from St. David's station, to which we now descended very cautiously to the accompaniment of squealing wheel flanges and rumbling brake rodding beneath our feet.

A tedious afternoon trek across north Devon into Cornwall followed, our train shedding bits off the back end at both Okehampton (for Plymouth) and Halwill Junction (for Bude, with 41298 as the uninspiring motive power waiting nearby).



Our lordly "West Country" pacific now found itself hauling just three coaches on a single line with passing loops at the stations! A brief Launceston stop connected with smart GWR tank no.4574 and 2-coach "B" set bound for Tavistock, and after a couple more remote wayside calls we rolled into our destination, Camelford, at around half past four. This was a very neat and tidy country station, situated at a quiet crossroads high up on the moors and seemingly miles from anywhere (in fact about one-and-a-half miles from Camelford township itself). The main station building had a somewhat gloomy appearance as not only the roof but also the upper walls were clad with grey slates, presumably as additional protection against severe weather in this exposed spot. The whole was somewhat in need of a lick of paint, as both the name board (proclaiming "Camelford - change for Boscastle and Tintagel") and the tiny platform mounted signal box were adorned in peeling brown and white livery - presumed to be that of the L&SWR - rather than Southern green! Only four or five other people got off the train here, and it chuffed away briskly as we left the platform. This was not quite the end of our marathon journey, as we then had to endure a half hour wait out in the yard for the Southern National bus, so called "connecting service" to Tintagel (clearly tabulated as such in the railway timetable) which eventually materialized in the form of a rattly Bristol K-type double-decker. This timing obviously anticipated late running of the train as a matter of routine!

On the first Saturday of our stay, I negotiated permission for a visit to Wadebridge station, junction of the North Cornwall line with the WR branch to Bodmin Road via Bodmin General. The objective was not a full afternoon of train spotting as at Seaton Junction, for Wadebridge was hardly busy even at the height of summer, but rather to see the trio of ancient LSWR Beattie 2-4-0 well tanks long kept there for working the Wenford Bridge china clay line. This mission had to be accomplished much more efficiently than my Axminster fiasco of two years previously, as time was now fast running out for these veterans according to the magazines. I figured that on a Saturday it was likely all three would be present on the shed, and hoped the staff would be friendly.

We travelled by bus direct from Tintagel, as there was no service via Camelford and the train for several hours; my father accompanied me, as curious as I was to see these famous old engines. The bus was now a comfortable new "Lodekka", but travelling this way we missed seeing the massive Delabole slate quarries at close quarters, also the undoubted rural delights of Port Isaac Road station.

We arrived in Wadebridge over the ancient and narrow stone river bridge just after two, to be confronted with closed level crossing gates, as the last remnant - 3 coaches - off the 7.30am Waterloo pulled away for Padstow behind an unrebuilt light pacific. When the gates opened, we alighted from the bus and hastened to the station. Already waiting at the platform with another service to Padstow, only a few minutes after the through train, was LMR Ivatt tank 41272 on a pair of faded green Maunsell carriages, the 2.00 from Bodmin North (the former L&SWR terminus in Bodmin). Despite this lavish level of service fare paying passengers were conspicuous by their absence.

41272 puffed gently off on its way, and the station took on the somnolent air of a warm and lazy Sunday afternoon, despite being a Saturday!

There was an unexpected bonus for us; Beattie tank 30587 was in steam as the station pilot engine, and posed ideally for a photograph in the sun outside the stone built goods shed, at the head of a mineral wagon and a couple of box vans. Shunting activity looked imminent but was not forthcoming, and no crew were to be seen anywhere. Everything remained very quiet for some time, so we explored thoroughly around the station environs.



To the south of the main station area a street of elegant terraced houses (the quaintly named "Guineaport") provided a grandstand view of the single lines from Bodmin and Camelford, running side by side at this point. Just opposite the main crossovers was situated a small L&SWR pattern signal box, Wadebridge East, with signalman in his shirtsleeves tending a small vegetable patch between duties, the box door and end window left open for ventilation and so that the block bells could be clearly heard. There was a small engine shed and coaling yard on the north side of the station facing the river estuary, and a long siding ran right up to the signal box steps.

Here was stabled the second Beattie tank, 30586, the one with the square wheel splashers, out of use and already looking somewhat forlorn. Parked next to it was its intended replacement, small GWR outside cylindered pannier tank 1368, of the type familiar to me at Weymouth and later on our 1960 Swindon works visit but quite unexpected here in Southern territory, looking equally unused. I hoped that these newcomers would not prove suitable for the Wenford line, leaving the well tank veterans to continue in peace for a while longer, but it was not to be.



The third of the Beattie trio, together with a second 13xx pannier were found lurking in the depths of the main shed building, in the company of a couple of N class 2-6-0s, all cold. The only sign of life came from sister engine 31875, which stood noisily on the turntable at the far end of the shed area, having plenty of steam to spare as the crew oiled round. It shortly ran out past the signal box and

reversed to depart light engine, tender first towards Padstow - in which direction, as far as we had seen since our arrival, everything seemed to be heading, with nothing coming back!



This imbalance was corrected after a further break of twenty minutes or so, with a flurry of activity on the Bodmin route; by this time we had made our way to the other end of the station complex, by the main road level crossing. Here, all lines converged down to one only, and the area around the crossing was very narrow, hemmed in closely by tall buildings. This line originally just served some sidings on the Quay on the north side of the road, and it was obvious how the route had been extended from its terminus at Wadebridge towards Padstow at a later date.

The block bells of the tiny north box clanged urgently just on 3.00pm, and a porter signalman hastened up the steps to struggle with the large cast-iron gate wheel, pulling the heavy wooden gates across the main road with a satisfying thud against their posts. No. 41272 loomed very close on its way back with the Bodmin North train, running into the up main platform line. The gates remained firmly closed across the



road until a branch train from the south, headed by diesel hydraulic loco D6314, had come safely to a halt in the bay platform opposite. This was the 2.30pm from Bodmin Road, reversing in Bodmin General, and comprised a 2-coach ex-GWR B-set in maroon livery. We hurried back to our terrace viewpoint opposite the main signal box as 41272 was detached from its train and run over into the shed sidings to take on a few basketfuls of coal in its bunker. I photographed it returning back to the coaches and noted that it



bore a small plaque on the side tank commemorating the fact that this was the 7000th locomotive built at Crewe works, in 1952. This, together with the alien London Midland region number, showed that it had strayed a long way from its intended home territory.

While 41272 was in the loco yard, D6314 ran around its train briskly and noisily, using the loop adjacent to the bay road, coupled up again, and stood idling for some while, surrounded by an aura of smelly diesel oil fumes. There were now two two-coach trains waiting to depart for the Bodmin line, and once again very few intending passengers!



No. 41272 left first with the green carriages for Bodmin North. The diesel remained lurking until the next up train from Padstow called some ten minutes later, presumably to offer a useful service connection. The latter was the celebrated 3.13pm all stations stopper to Okehampton, the only train to go down the North Cornwall route for several hours, and comprised Mogul 31875 reappearing with three shabby Maunsell carriages and several 4-wheeled vans in tow. As soon as it left, the junction points and signals were reset and D6314 took off in a cloud of dense blue smoke, crossing over to the right-hand running line by the signal box, with its maroon train to Bodmin General and the GWR main line at Bodmin Road.

A further hour or so of slumber ensued, and we sat on the island platform partaking of afternoon tea from our flasks and sandwich boxes. Eventually a crew appeared from the loco yard mess room and headed with some urgency towards 30587, still waiting patiently in the small goods yard; the blower was put on, at last preparing for its moment of glory that hot Saturday afternoon! We had decided to wait for the arrival of the down "Atlantic Coast Express" (10.35am from Waterloo on August Saturdays) before heading for the bus home, and this duly appeared behind unrebuilt pacific 34066 "Spitfire", running in quite fast just before 5 o'clock.

As this elegant machine simmered quietly with its three Bullied coaches in the short down main platform, 30587 scuttled out and buffered up just one van, no doubt urgently needed at Padstow, to the rear. It then retired to the shed, exertion over for the day. After three hours of patient waiting I had finally seen a Beattie well tank at work!



Our mission was now fully accomplished, but I was nonetheless disappointed that the 45XX prairie tanks and 57XX pannier types traditionally associated with the W.R Bodmin line workings had seemingly all disappeared from the area by now. Only a few days after our visit, the Beatties too were dispersed, and two of them appeared briefly in the London area, on a special train working for enthusiasts later in 1962, before going for preservation; we had caught them on their regular stamping ground just in time!

Just for the record, here are the Southern National bus routes serving Tintagel, Camelford and Wadebridge which we used in 1962:

- 122 Boscastle – Tintagel – Camelford – Wadebridge
- 400 Delabole – Tintagel – Callington – Plymouth (via Altarnun)
- 402 Delabole – Tintagel – Launceston – Plymouth (via Piperspool & Hallworthy)

These were then worked by Bristol “Lodekka” or Bristol K series double-deckers.

A few weeks later, after our return home and having had the photographs processed, I was studying these carefully and thinking about what we had seen that afternoon at Wadebridge; a little mystery presented itself! It was common knowledge that the Beattie tanks had worked on the Wenfordbridge line since time immemorial, hauling out the china clay trains from the drying sheds on the first stage of their journey to the Potteries - all the published pictures show this. But where did they haul them to? Since the junction faced that way, I assumed Wadebridge, where the little engines were always based, then onward with a larger locomotive towards Okehampton and civilization. But I could not ever recall seeing a picture of one of the L&SWR tanks on a china clay train at Wadebridge, where they were much more easily accessible to enthusiasts than in the woods along the mineral branch, and there was certainly no sign of any of the distinctive open wagons, loaded or otherwise, in my photographs.

Solution of this little conundrum had to wait several years, and two further visits to the area. The Beattie engines had of course long since gone, also the GW tanks which superseded them. The North Cornwall line had become part of the Western Region in 1963, and was inevitably soon closed, at the end of 1966.

We encountered the Bodmin North train in the summer of that year, late one evening; it was still as frequent and as empty as ever, but now comprised only a light 4-wheeled diesel rail bus. For some reason we failed to make a journey on this route before it was too late.



In the summer of 1971, myself and two college friends were touring Cornwall by car, with wider Industrial Archaeological interests now that the attraction of the railways had been greatly diminished by the demise of steam traction and widespread closures. Revisiting Wadebridge station, or rather the very derelict site of it was a bad idea, most depressing, and we hastened away south towards the G.W main line. We just happened to pull into the station yard at Bodmin Road as participants and rolling stock were being assembled for a Great Western Society brake van tour up the Bodmin branch - by this time a freight only line - and continuing right through to Wenford; surprisingly this section also still functioned.

Our plans for the rest of the day were rapidly reconsidered and our spokesman managed to persuade the society officials that they should increase their passenger count by three, after a suitable amount of money had changed hands. The motive power was a 350hp diesel shunter, D3526, and the journey involved two reversals, the first in the old GWR terminus of Bodmin General and the second right out in the country at Boscarne Junction, only four miles or so south east of Wadebridge, where the former through route was now terminated in temporary buffer stops.



Despite the modern motive power, some of the old traditions of working the Wenford branch still lingered. After the loco had run round the brake vans at the clay dries and deposited its long train of empty wagons, the return journey was halted abruptly in the woods after a short distance, just by the back door of a local hostelry to which the crew adjourned for a leisurely liquid lunch, leaving the train standing unattended on the single running line. The tour participants really had no option but to join in, so the landlord and a



few crusty locals were quite overwhelmed by the sudden popularity of their normally quiet watering hole. The conversation inevitably got around to the old days, and it transpired that this lunch-time siesta went back long into history, like the Beattie tanks. Indeed, on days when the pub was closed, the loco crew had their own key to the back door by the track, and could go in and help themselves!

The answer to my little mystery was at last provided at Boscarne Junction: here were situated the exchange sidings where the Southern tanks used to hand over their clay trains to the Western region, which then needed to reverse them again in Bodmin General station. The GWR had carefully built up a near monopoly of the china clay traffic in Cornwall from the areas around St. Austell and St. Dennis, and was not going to let that from the outpost at Wenford be lost to the rival Southern route for the sake of a little bit of operational inconvenience!

Keith A. Jagers 1995