



Combe Rail members'
magazine Issue #1
- Spring 2016
(Combe Rail - Charitable
Incorporated Organization
1164083)

WELCOME!

A warm welcome to all new members of Combe Rail! As of 4th April 2016, membership stands at 88, with new supporters joining each week. This is a remarkable achievement for the four months we've been in operation, and testifies to the great affection in which the Ilfracombe-Barnstaple railway is still held. Combe Rail was set up to "preserve the heritage" of this railway, and we already have several exciting plans in place (see below.) This newsletter, The Devon Belle, will also play its part in preserving the line's heritage, by collecting and publishing YOUR articles, histories, memories and photographs. Two recent Facebook groups [Railway to Ilfracombe...in Pictures](#) and [Reversing Beeching - The Ilfracombe Line](#) have produced a treasure-trove of photos and recollections - but as is often the way with Facebook, many photos are uncredited, and interesting information can be spread across separate threads. The Devon Belle will be the first regular (quarterly) periodical about the line, and all articles will be indexed, to create an ever-growing reference work. If you have memories to share, photos, or even an article for publication, send them to us at info@combe-rail.org.uk

NEWS

GIFT AID PLEA

If you are a UK income tax payer, we can reclaim 25% of your annual membership subscription from HMRC. If you have not already made a Gift Aid declaration (and this will apply to the great majority of members who paid via PayPal) you can download a form [here](#). Please scan or photograph your signed declaration, and email it to info@combe-rail.org.uk. This will save us using Combe Rail's valuable funds sending out forms and SAEs later on. Many thanks!

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The first AGM of Combe Rail CIO will take place on Saturday 10th September 2016 in The Lantern, High Street, Ilfracombe. The Great Hall will be open to the public from 10am-1.30pm and Combe Rail trustees will be on hand to meet CR members and to talk to members of the public about our plans. The AGM itself will start at 2pm, and members who wish to attend are requested to bring ID (e.g. driving licence) in order to be admitted and to receive a ballot paper. Under UK charity law, all three current Trustees must stand down at this AGM, and may then stand for re-election. The current Trustees are: Richard Heacock (Chair), Yvonne Hin (Secretary) and Dan Roche (Treasurer.) In addition, Combe Rail has two officers who are not Trustees: John Burch (Vice Chair) and Geoff Spong (Press Officer.) Members may stand for election to any of these posts. Members wishing to stand as a Trustee should check that they are eligible to do so [here](#). Nominations for willing candidates must be received in writing % Membership Secretary, Flat 5, Holly House, Avenue Rd ILFRACOMBE EX34 9AT by 10th August 2016. Nominations should be signed by a proposer and seconder, both of whom are paid-up CR members.



ILFRACOMBE MODEL RAILWAY SOCIETY EXHIBITION

Combe Rail had a presence at IMRS exhibition in the Landmark Pavilion on Easter Saturday 26th March. Many thanks to IMRS secretary Dave Watts for inviting us. Thanks also to the members of the public who braved the Bank Holiday weather in order to enjoy the superb layouts. We had many interesting conversations with people who remembered the line, we sold 42 fridge magnet totems (available as "Ilfracombe", "Braunton" or "Barnstaple Town") and signed up 4 new members. Highlights of the exhibition were IMRS' model of Barnstaple Town, and [Burnham MRC's model of Ilfracombe station](#).

Pictured: Dan Roche and Richard Heacock (Combe Rail) Janet Day and Mike Day (Tarka Rail Association)



HERITAGE PROJECTS

1) RAILWAY INTERPRETATION TRAIL

ILFRACOMBE RAILWAY INTERPRETATION TRAIL



video post #5 The Bank



The Ilfracombe Railway Interpretation Trail was installed in 2016 by



with financial assistance from.....

Three railway information boards were installed on Cycle Path 27 in 2001 by the Northern Devon Coast and Countryside Service (precursor of today's Biosphere Service.) Of these, one at Willingcott has been removed, whilst two remain, at Ilfracombe and Lee Bridge. These boards, whilst attractive and informative, are showing signs of age. We have approached Biosphere Service and North Devon Council with a plan to supplement these boards with a guided Railway Interpretation Trail. A series of 10 video posts will be installed along the trackbed between Ilfracombe and Willingcott. Each post will carry a plaque with 1) brief information about the location and 2) a QR code which links to an evocative then-and-now video slideshow of that location. Sound recordings of steam and diesel trains will accompany the slideshow, bringing the scene instantly to life, and the commentary will feature railway recollections from the Ilfracombe Museum Oral History Project (1985.) Biosphere and NDC are very keen on this project and we are jointly investigating sources of funding. Illustrated is a mock-up video post plaque, and the QR code (try it, it works!) links to a demonstration [video](#).

2) SURVIVING RAILWAY INFRASTRUCTURE



Much original railway infrastructure survives between Ilfracombe and Willingcott, including two "Exmouth Junction" prefabricated concrete permanent way huts, and the down distant signal post (illustrated, c.1960) at Slade reservoir. These will be restored in conjunction with the new Interpretation Trail, and durable seating (made from concrete railway sleepers) will be installed at suitable locations. Dependent on funding, it is also hoped to install a demonstration 30' track panel at some point on the notorious 1-in-36 Ilfracombe bank.

3) ILFRACOMBE STATION STEPS

Pedestrians used to approach Ilfracombe station via several flights of steps at the top of Station Road. Remarkably, these steps, the handrails, and the 1930's Southern railway lampposts (complete with lamp shades) still survive, hidden by undergrowth on land belonging to the Pall factory which now occupies the station site. We have approached Pall for permission to restore these steps, and have commissioned an artist's impression (right.)

Whilst the steps will probably need to remain inaccessible to the public behind Pall's security fence for the time being, their restoration will make a fitting tribute to the important station which once stood there, an attractive gateway to today's popular cycle trail, and an attractive approach to Pall's own premises.

Two concrete posts also survive, which used to carry a large "Ilfracombe Station" sign and notice board. We will commission a new sign to serve as a tribute to the former station and as a welcome to Cycle Route 27:



ILFRACOMBE STATION

TICKET OFFICE

**NATIONAL
CYCLE
NETWORK**

**ROUTE
27**

From 1874 - 1970
these steps led to
the
ticket office at
Ilfracombe Station.

This former station approach
was restored in June 2016
by kind permission of:

PALL UK

With financial assistance
from:

.....

.....

.....

and with the participation of
Combe Rail,

.....

.....

4) HERITAGE LINE

This will be a harder and longer-term project than the restoration projects above, but it remains our ultimate goal. The first question is where? Much of the trackbed has been redeveloped as cycle path (Cycle Route 27 from Ilfracombe to Willingcott, and Tarka Trail from Braunton to Barnstaple) whilst the remaining stretch between Braunton and Willingcott is in multiple, private ownership and has been built upon. The most promising starting location looks to be from Chivenor Cross towards Pottington, where there are several miles of double-track railway formation, which could accommodate a single-track standard gauge line alongside the Tarka Trail cycle path. Our investigations are in the early stages, but what we need most urgently is some expert support: if you have professional experience of or expertise in: planning, surveying, civil engineering, local government, law, conveyancing, finance, accounting, grant applications etc etc - even if you live at some distance and can only offer support by email - we want to hear from you!



PHOTOS AND MEMORIES

This photo was sent in by John Baddick of Ilfracombe. It shows his father, Ray Baddick (3rd from L) and Station Master Charlie Stevens (far R) at Woolacombe and Morteohoe station in about 1960. Can you name either of the other two, or provide any further information?

Do you have a photo of the railway, which we could publish in *Devon Belle*? Email it to us, along with any interesting background information, to info@combe-rail.org.uk

THE NORTH DEVON RAILWAY CO. LTD. BY MICHAEL BROCKINGTON

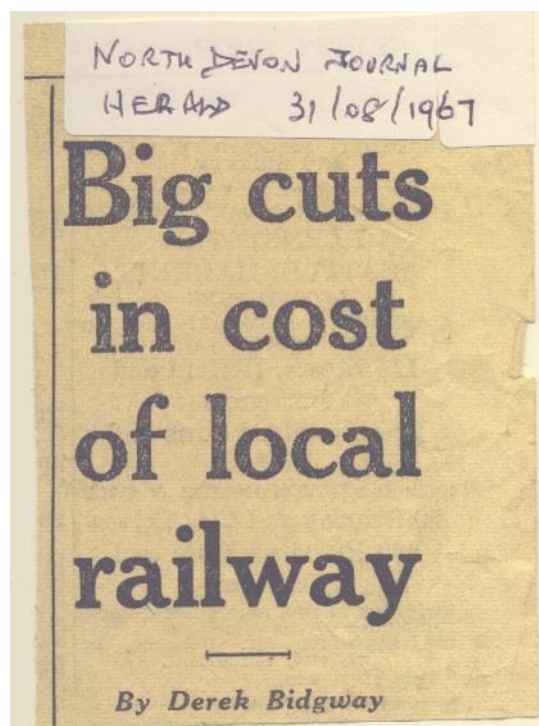
Combe Rail member Michael Brockington recalls his long association with the railways of North Devon, and his close involvement with the 1973-75 attempt to preserve the Ilfracombe line.

My first visit to North Devon was in September 1935, when as a young child I went with my parents, who were staying in Minehead, on a day trip to Lynton and Lynmouth. My father wanted me to walk up the hill from Lynton to see the Lynton and Barnstaple railway, before it closed that month, but I was so fascinated by the Cliff Railway, I refused, a decision I have regretted, ever since. My next visit was with my late wife to Ilfracombe, the first of many holidays in the 1950's early 60's. We used to travel on the Summer Saturdays only through train from Birmingham Snow Hill via Stratford-upon-Avon, the Taunton - Barnstaple line and reversing in Barnstaple Victoria Road. In later years the trains used the avoiding line direct to Barnstaple junction and thence to Ilfracombe. The through train from Birmingham to Ilfracombe was withdrawn after 1966. We used to have a holiday runabout ticket and on one occasion visited Bude, changing at CREDITON, and returning via Halwill junction and Bideford. Unfortunately, somewhere near Petrockstow, the one coach steam train ran into some pigs on the line, killing one, which delayed the train, so we missed the connection at Barnstaple junction and had to return to Ilfracombe by bus. It was quite amusing that the firemen blamed the driver for the accident, claiming that he was taking a bend too fast. In 1962 we bought a static caravan at Morteheo, which became our holiday base for the rest of the 1960's. During that time we saw British Rail attempting to retain the Barnstaple - Ilfracombe line by making substantial cuts, in singling the whole line on 17th. December 1967 (see attached cutting). Sadly the cuts were not enough and the Ilfracombe line finally closed on 5th. October 1970, the last train departing on 3rd. October.

I was extremely pleased that on 17th. February 1973 the North Devon Railway Co.Ltd., was set up, together with a Preservation Society to try to reopen the Ilfracombe line, and I was one of the many people who invested in the company. However, I did not know, at the time, that with the British Rail asking price of £ 502,000, which had been increased from the original quote of £ 315,000, it was never likely to succeed, particularly as with two flotation attempts only £16,216 was raised, with most of this amount being swallowed up by a so-called fund raising company called 'Words in Action', headed by the late Bernard Van Dieren and the North Devon Railway Co. Ltd. was wound up in January 1978. (see attached cutting). In 1973 Sir Gerald Nabarro was appointed President of the Preservation Society and Chairman of the Limited Company. However, Sir Gerald, who suggested that the Ilfracombe line would be the "best of the lot" of Heritage Railways, sadly died on 18th. November, the same year, at the early age of 60. Had Sir Gerald survived beyond that time, events may have been entirely different, we shall never know. British Rail ran a special train over the Ilfracombe branch on Wednesday 26th. February 1975 to assess the condition of the track, for a possible restoration of passenger services. The train consisted of a single coach engineers saloon, hauled by a Class 25 locomotive. However, it was not to be.

Following this, I was in contact with the late E.J.C. Daniel (John), who was Secretary of the Preservation Society and a Director of the Limited Company, to ask what could be done to try to rescue the scheme. Having identified a source of finance, we had a meeting with a Councillor at Devon County Council, in Exeter, who held the Transport portfolio. His attitude was that there were already two heritage railways in Devon and basically that his Council was not interested, in spite of the fact, as we pointed out, that both heritage railways were in South Devon, and that there were none in North Devon. We also suggested that instead of terminating trains at the old Barnstaple Junction, trains should continue to Barnstaple Town station, which was closer to the town centre, but this was rejected. We did have a suggestion from Lord Park that the Ilfracombe line should be reopened as a narrow gauge, with the same gauge as the Lynton and Barnstaple Railway, but this was not pursued. We then spoke to the then North Devon M.P., Jeremy Thorpe, who agreed to support the late rescue bid. It was rather interesting that Jeremy always seemed to end his conversations with the words 'Good Hunting,' rather than 'Goodbye'!

Again he, unfortunately, was ultimately unable to help. However, about this



time British Rail started lifting the track, which we tried to stop, but the British Rail Property Board, in Bristol, insisted on £ 20,000 being paid by 9.00 a.m. on the morning following my telephone call, which we were unable to do, at such short notice.

BRITISH Rail have slashed thousands of pounds off the running costs of the Barnstaple-Ilfracombe line, and now they and the Ministry of Transport are discussing whether it can stay open.

Already timetables have been drawn up to keep the service running throughout the winter and next summer. And changes that are to be carried out at Barnstaple Junction Station have been planned to include passenger traffic to the resort.

A Ministry spokesman in London yesterday drew a curtain of secrecy over what chances the line has for survival.

He made no mention of the talks, which were announced by a Railways officer at Plymouth.

But the Ministry man did reveal: "No formal proposal for closing the Ilfracombe line has been put to us by the Board."

The threat that the much-postponed closing date for the line will be announced this autumn still lingers. But railway officials now believe that the financial scales can be turned in favour of a long reprieve.

On top of economies made in the past 12 months, British Rail are to go ahead with converting the branch line into a single track. This could save another £12,000 a year.

It remains to be seen, now, whether any other major improvement work is needed on the route—and whether the Ministry is prepared to help keep it operational.

No 'up' platform

Barnstaple Junction is due to undergo quite a change before the end of this year. The "up" platform, which includes the former refreshment room, booking office and Smith's bookstall, will be taken out of passenger service.

Both "up" and "down" passenger trains will come in at the island platform, which is reached via a footbridge. Much of the Junction's complicated track system will be removed, saving maintenance costs.

Buildings on the "up" platform will be converted to provide better facilities for staffs, and the platform itself will be used for parcels and mail traffic.

Area manager Mr. Edward McLauchlan said yesterday: "The plan is to make better use of the space we have—and this includes both the station and the goods yard. There will be full facilities for passengers on the island platform."

A spokesman for W. H. Smith and Son said their Junction bookstall is due to close in September. She knew of no plans to re-site it on the island platform.

We then tried to have Ilfracombe station and the River Taw bridge at Barnstaple, Grade II listed, but after due deliberation, both applications were thrown out. I also wrote to Pall Europe Limited, who by this time had acquired the Ilfracombe station site, to ask, if they could reserve part of their site for a heritage railway station, but this was refused. At this stage, sadly, we both reluctantly, had to give up. John Daniel had a large collection of photographs taken on the Ilfracombe line, many in colour. I wonder what happened to them.

(cutting from *Business Post*, January 1978)

How rail dream came unstuck

by Sebastian Taylor,
Our City Editor

ENTHUSIASM of individuals concerned with the attempt to preserve the Barnstaple to Ilfracombe railway line outweighed their abilities with the result that subscriptions from the general public totalling £16,216 were swallowed up by expenses of another company involved in promoting the line's flotation.

The sad story of the North Devon Railway Company is detailed in a Department of Trade report written by joint inspectors Mr. James Buttiner and Mr. Brian Hooper, appointed to investigate the company's affairs in April, 1976.

Their report was submitted in November, 1977, and the company was ordered to be wound up in January, 1978, on petition of the Secretary of State for Trade.

Failure

Now, however, publication of the report fills in the essential financial backcloth to the company's failure to realise the dreams of railway enthusiasts following the line's closure by British Rail in

Fish market

NEWLYN FISH MARKET. — Large Ray, 550, 560; Pouting, 70, 180, 210; Medium Ray, 350; Star Ray, 260; Red Mullet, 1000, 1550; Small Ray, 110 130; Small Hake, 490; Medium Hake, 740; Conger, 150, 250, 380; Monk, 350, 750, 1150, 1350; Plaice, 250, 350, 410, 470; Lemon Sole, 450, 520, 590, 840, 850; Dogfish, 100, 150, 220; Soles, 1930, 1950, 1980; Medium Soles, 1220; Turbot, 1920, 2000, 2040; Cod, 380, 410, 450; Brill, 750, 950; Pollock, 300, 350; Dabs, 200, 260, 320; Haddock, 250, 350, 550; Roes, 550, 600; Ling, 250, 280; Gurnards, 60; Saithe, 250; Squid, 980; Crab Claws, 420; Whiting, 150, 200, 320.

1970.

Closure of the line was followed by a meeting of preservationists in Ilfracombe in May, 1971, and the North Devon Railway Society was formed. The society was later divided into the North Devon Railway Company and the North Devon Railway Preservation Society.

The company was formed in February, 1973, with a nominal capital of only £100 and, later that year, the late Sir Gerald Nabarro became president of the North Devon Railway Preservation Society and chairman of the North Devon Railway Company.

The initial price quoted by British Rail of £315,000 for purchase of the line was raised to £502,000 and, following the death of Sir Gerald, the company unfortunately became involved with a spurious concern, Words in Action.

This concern was headed by the late Mr. Bernard Van Dieren, "variously described as a fund-raising expert and a teacher of psycho-cybernetics," say the DoT inspectors.

The July, 1974, prospectus sought to raise £680,000. But, say the inspectors, the flotation was a "shambles" and only £9,873 was raised.

A second prospectus in September, 1974, following Mr. Van Dieren's appointment as chairman, raised £609,20 — Mr. Van Dieren died in December, 1974.

Total assets of the company at the time of the inspectors' report amounted to £418.72. It was not

possible to quantify the company's debts apart from amounts owing to subscribers, but the company was obviously "hopelessly insolvent."

The greater part of the public subscriptions totalling £16,216 both before and as a result of the two flotation attempts in 1974 was swallowed up in the expenses of Words in Action.

"We do not consider the prospectus to be false or misleading in any material particular," comment the inspectors.

"Whether the line could have been commercially viable under the proprietorship of the North Devon Railway Company will never be known.

Doubtful

"In any event, we are doubtful as to how many investors gave detailed consideration to the prospectus.

"In support of this we would point out that, of the 2,302 subscribers, 1,055 subscribed for £1 or less and a further 1,133 subscribed for between £2 and £10.

"Nine hundred and seventy of the subscribers applied for their shares before the prospectus was published.

"We do not say this to make light of the Companies Act infringements — in particular the outrageous infringement of Section 47 — but we have attempted to take a realistic view.

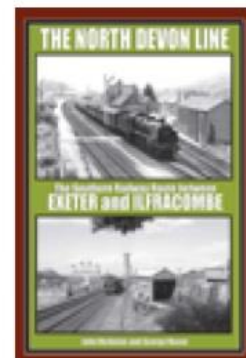
"It seems likely that the majority of the investors were 'clubbing together' to reinstate the railway rather than making a financial investment in the generally accepted sense of the term."

Combe Rail member Gary Best has begun to compile a list of all available books about the railway. More titles will be added in future issues of Devon Belle.

ISBN No	Book Title	Author
978-1-906919-28-3	The North Devon Line Exeter and Ilfracombe	John Nicholas & George Reeve

Irwell Press

For more than a century trains to the North Devon line commenced their journey at Exeter Central station, 171 miles from Waterloo and the centre of the Southern network in the West Country. Although North Devon line trains usually started their journey from here they often incorporated through coaches from Waterloo, brought down in an express which was re-marshalled at Exeter Central. The restaurant cars would be taken off, the through carriages to Plymouth, Padstow and Bude leaving first on the Plymouth train and the through carriages to Ilfracombe and Torrington following on the North Devon train. The most famous of these trains was the 'Atlantic Coast Express' or 'ACE', the 11 o'clock from Waterloo but of course the 1.10am, 9am, 1pm and 3pm expresses from Waterloo usually conveyed through coaches to North Devon.



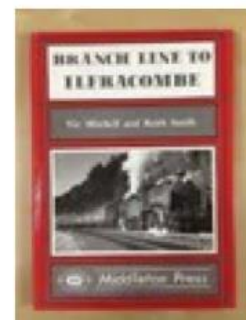
978 -1-873793-21-9	Branch Line to Ilfracombe	Vic Mitchell & Keith Smith
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Middleton Press

Gives a line history with both photos, track layout, tickets.

in print

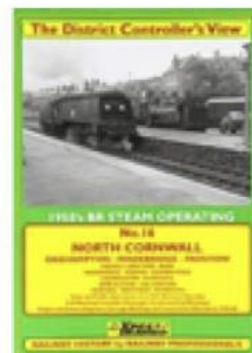
Maybe available on ebay or Amazon



978-1-901056-40-2	The District Controller's View No 14 North Devon
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Xpress Publishing

This book, the fourteenth in the series, deals with the Summer Saturday traffic between Waterloo, Exeter and Ilfracombe with equal attention being given to the branch from Barnstaple to Bideford and Torrington. The lines from Torrington to Halwill and from Taunton to Barnstaple are also dealt with. No operational detail has been omitted in recreating for the reader the activities of a Summer Saturday in North Devon. A complete set of engine diagrams is included together with the shed workings for both Barnstaple and Ilfracombe. Locomens workings for both depots are given in full as are the 84 carriage workings that came into play. (One set of North Devon coaches may well have set the mileage record for Britain by covering no less than three workings between London and Ilfracombe: a total of 680 miles). The allocation of engines for the entire 1950's is given as is the complete Summer Saturday Working Timetable for trains between Exeter and Ilfracombe, Barnstaple to Torrington and the ex-GWR line from Taunton to Barnstaple. For good measure the North Devon & Cornwall Junction Light Railway has also been included.



In Search Of a Lost Dream

Dave Baxter M.A.S.C.

Moonshadow Media

Shows what remains of the Barnstaple to Ilfracombe branch today. Mostly photos.
Available as a Ebook from apple ibooks

not in print

Maybe available on ebay or Amazon



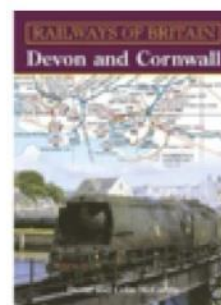
978-0-7110-3302-3

Railways of Britain
Devon & Cornwall

Colin & David McCarthy

Ian Allan

Maps of the lines with opening & closing dates, photos.



978-0-946290-03-2

Back along the Lines
North Devon's Railway

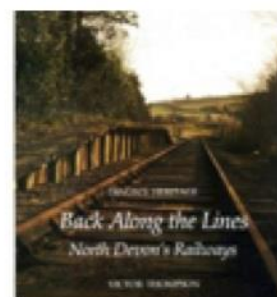
Victor Thompson

Badger Books, Bideford, Devon (1983)

Gives a line history with photos.

Not in Print

Maybe available on ebay or Amazon



978-0-85361-368-0 The Barnstaple and Ilfracombe Railway

Colin G Maggs

Oakwood Press (now sold on to Stenlake Publishing Ltd)
Book Ref 111

Gives a line history with both photos, track layouts.

Not in Print

Maybe available on ebay or Amazon

