

THE DEVON BELLE

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IN THIS ISSUE....

... We have an update on our two core projects - The Railway Heritage Trail and the Barnstaple-Braunton Community Light Railway. There's a report of our first public railway exhibition and AGM. Combe Rail member (CR) Jon Kliem recalls his youthful fascination with the railway in Braunton, CR Tony Olsson solves a photo mystery in the North Devon Journal and artist David Halliwell explains how he created a painting from three source photos.

NEWS

Our first AGM was held in The Lantern Centre, Ilfracombe on 10th September. Original trustees Richard Heacock, Yvonne Hin and Dan Roche were re-elected, and new Trustees John Burch and David Luggar were elected. A healthy bank balance was reported, and Andy Hedges was appointed as independent auditor. An informal and enthusiastic discussion followed with the members present.



The AGM was preceded by a free public railway exhibition in the Lantern Centre Great Hall. Guest exhibitors included the Tarka Rail Association, The Lynton & Barnstaple Railway, The West Somerset Railway, The Tarka Valley Railway, Instow Signal Box and Braunton Museum. Visitors were impressed by the range and diversity of railway and railway heritage groups across North Devon. All exhibitors agreed the exhibition was good publicity,

and we plan to stage another exhibition in September 2017 - hopefully to become an annual event.

RAILWAY HERITAGE TRAIL NEWS



Pall Europe (who own the site on which Ilfracombe station stood) have approved our plan to install a [replica of the original Ilfracombe Station sign](#). They also generously offered - as part of their own ongoing site maintenance programme - to clear substantial undergrowth to reveal the surviving steps, which led up to the station from Station Road. Seen here (photo: Matt Boni) the steps are visible again for the first time in 40 years. Meanwhile, we are seeking necessary planning permissions and funding partners in order to install our Railway Heritage Trail (see Devon Belle #1.)

COMMUNITY LIGHT RAILWAY NEWS



North Devon members may have seen the [article in the North Devon Gazette](#) on 31st August, in which we launched our proposal for new, modern Community Light Railway between Barnstaple and Braunton. We have consulted extensively with North Devon Council about options for using

(illustration: prototype [VLR](#) Very Light Rail vehicle)

the available trackbed. Whilst there was little optimism about the viability of another heritage railway in the region, there was genuine excitement about the possibility and need for a modern Community Light Railway. As a light railway, this will be able to share the old railway formation with the Tarka Trail cycle path, without impacting adversely on an important leisure resource. Ultimately it will re-connect with the national rail network at Barnstaple, bringing connectivity and prosperity to the whole area. You can read our draft [proposal here](#). This proposal has now gone to NDC and to the Councillors whose wards lie along the route. We are urging NDC to include our proposal in their infrastructure planning and, as a first step, to protect the entire route against adverse developments (this is already strongly recommended in the emerging North Devon Local Plan.)

CR Jon Kliem recalls his childhood in Braunton, and his fascination with the railway.



(The Kliem family at Braunton station c.1963 - author 2nd L)

As a boy in the early 60's, growing up in the centre of Braunton, the railway to Ilfracombe was always an exciting part of my life. Standing at the bottom of my garden, you could see the trains passing between a gap in the school buildings. If the wind was coming in from the sea, my mother would race out to gather in the washing before passing smoke and smuts would drift over our garden - the smell of which all rail enthusiasts still relish to this day. Braunton was a busy station, especially in the summer months. I remember the cars patiently queuing when the level crossing gates closed,

causing a gridlock at the main traffic lights, a sight all too familiar nowadays without the railway! As they closed, we would run as fast as we could and stand in awe as these massive, hissing, breathing monoliths trundled, either into or out of Braunton station. They would pass so close to the gates you could feel the heat off them, especially if it was a double-header of the Battle of Britain class, which was always a special treat. One time I counted three engines, two at the front, with one pushing hard from the back. The engines looked nothing like you see them nowadays, shiny, polished and gleaming - they were filthy, grimy with a touch of rust thrown in for added colour, but they fascinated me!!



(34056 "Croydon" arriving at Braunton on an up train c1965. photo Alan Edwards)

My father would regularly visit his sister in Germany, catching the train from Braunton, not getting off until London Waterloo, from there he would swap platforms for the boat train to Ostend, changing there for his final leg of his journey. Can you imagine that? Braunton to Germany, changing trains, twice!!! I remember the day when my brother said there was a warship passing through Braunton, I raced down to the railway expecting to see some sort of battleship passing through, only to be confronted by this crimson diesel purring down the line. Steam engines were getting fewer and fewer and we blamed the diesels pushing them out the way.

One day, workmen came through and lifted one of the lines and took away all of the sidings in Braunton. This again saddened us, no more trucks in Braunton! Mum would take me with her shopping to Barnstaple on the train as we had no car. A few times they would be corridor coaches, but most I remember were the DMU's. I loved passing Chivenor airbase! We would pass very close to the planes taxiing along ready to take off - mainly Meteors or Hunter jets. Then we would pass along the estuary of the River Taw, yet again, very close and scary at high tide, thinking the train was about to topple into the river! As you entered the outskirts of Pottington in Barnstaple, sometimes, if you looked across the river, you could see a train on the opposite bank closing in on Barnstaple from Torrington, and I would pretend that we were racing them to the station, I never found out if we would of won because we always got off at Barnstaple Town station. As a Sunday treat, we would travel as a family to Ilfracombe, on the train, to visit Bicclescombe Park, where they had a lovely boating lake and a fantastic huge slide.

After the line singled, the ticket office closed in Braunton and you had to pay on the train. Quite a few times I remember nobody to buy tickets from on the train or at Ilfracombe station, even the staff at Ilfracombe told my parents not to worry about it. No wonder the line was losing revenue! We'd all wave at the train as it passed the playground at Caen Street School every day. I remember after school we would climb down under the railway bridge, which stretched over the River Caen and wait for a train to cross - the noise was deafening! We just all took it for granted that it would always be there, then one day the last train went through, packed to the seams and it was gone. The line stayed down for years, rusting, with weeds feet high, and I remember a company was formed to try and re-open it.

My friend and I would often climb the signals, one being so high it took me nearly an hour to inch my way down. We walked to Ilfracombe over the sleepers once. The station at



Ilfracombe had all its windows smashed by vandals. I remember peering into the turntable pit, full of rubbish, twisted wire and old bicycle wheels. But while the line was down I always hoped that one day trains would come back. When returning from potato picking on Braunton Great Field there was great excitement as a diesel had passed through Braunton pushing an inspection carriage. We all thought that that was it - the line was opening again.....not to be.

Within months, cranes moved in and ripped up the line.

(Inspection saloon DB999508, the last vehicle to travel on the Ilfracombe line, has survived and is being converted to passenger stock on the West Somerset Railway. Loco 26 063 was not so fortunate, and was cut up in Swindon in 1983.)

Guild of Railway Artists (GRA) Associate David Halliwell spoke to Devon Belle about how he created his recent painting of 257 Squadron storming Ilfracombe Bank.



Devon Belle: Is your painting based on a specific photograph?

David Halliwell: No, the painting was inspired by, and incorporates elements from three different photographs, with three different points of reference. The scene as you see it is actually not possible in reality. The row of terraced houses would be much further away to the left from the railway and the curve of the tracks is a bit sharper than it would be in reality. This, of course, is the advantage of painting a scene that would not be possible to photograph but the end result convinces the



observer that what he (she) is looking at is exactly how it is.



DH: As you can see in the first two photos, the houses are much further back from the railway than as painted.

DB: What prompted you to include the platelayers?

DH: The figures were added for a human interest and also to give scale and perspective.

DB: And the locomotive?

DH: Photo 3 was the basis of the locomotive except that I substituted the Bulleid pacific.

DB: Do you have any information about the photographs?

DH: They were freely downloaded from the internet, so I cannot vouch for the copyright!

(If any readers can supply details of the photos or the photographers, please let us know.)





CR Tony Olsson sent in this photo of the single-line token for Barnstaple Town to Barnstaple Junction. It is in the collection of [Barnstaple Museum](#).

CR Tony Olsson identifies a mystery railway location in the *North Devon Journal*

Peter Christie posed a question in the North Devon Journal of 8 October 2015:

“Where was this picture taken?”



Tony wrote to Peter Christie...

TO: There is a similar photo on page 55 of *The Ilfracombe Line* by John Nicolas and published by Irwell Press. The men are holding one of the carriage destination boards fitted on trains such as the Atlantic Coast Express, which would be dropped off at various stations en route from Waterloo. After having arrived at Ilfracombe, the board would have been removed and stored safely in the guard's compartment. The reason I am sure it is at Ilfracombe is the tall signal box to the right of the picture. Whilst not distinct in the photo in the Journal, it is unmistakably the signal box shown on page 49 of the book. I'm not so sure about the building in front of which the people are posed. It clearly is not the same building as the similar picture on page 55 – it has block work rather than uneven stones, and it is narrower. Having pored over many of the pictures and maps in the book, I cannot place it. The page 55 group is said to be in front of the goods shed; I suspect it is along one side of the shed. The Journal's shed is clearly an end-on view between tracks. The wall in your photo needs to be somewhere beyond the end of the platforms to include the signal box at the side in the distance. I can't locate it, so hopefully some other reader might be able to give a definitive identification. If you don't have or can't obtain a copy of *The Ilfracombe Line* book, I will happily provide an illustrated version of this letter.

PC: Many thanks for this - I will look at the Athenaeum's copy when next I visit. Could the site be Barnstaple?

TO: No Peter. It's definitely not Barnstaple. Whilst the signal box there is tall, it's positioned in front of a road bridge (see pages 1 and 2 in the previously mentioned book) and in the fork between the line to Bideford –Torrington – Okehampton etc and the line to Ilfracombe. The signal box was replaced in 1912 with one of normal height, which can be glimpsed beyond the bridge in the photo on page 4. The signal box in the photo you used in the Journal clearly isn't the one in Barnstaple. Whilst in the Athenaeum, it might be worth seeing if they have a copy of *An Illustrated History of Exmoor's Railways* by Martin Smith, published by Irwell Press. It has a section on the Ilfracombe line including photos of Ilfracombe not included in *The Ilfracombe Line* book.

TO: It doesn't solve our problem, but the picture and map on pages 54 and 55 illustrate how easy it is to be misled by what you read in print. The track shown around the new engine shed of 1929 is clearly different to that shown in the OS map of the post-1929 station. The

text says the signal box, which I've used to identify the 1931 photo in the Journal, was demolished in the 1929 redevelopments.

PC: Many thanks for this - I have attached my scan of the original where definition is better - might help you identify it?



TO: Cracked it! With the uncropped photo showing the strange looking contraption on the top of the wall, I was quickly able to identify it as the crane in the goods yard.

