Combe Rail members' magazine - issue #5 Spring 2017

(Combe Rail CIO - Charitable Incorporated Organisation 1164083)

IN THIS ISSUE....

... CR George Reeve (Irwell Press) looks at workings over Mortehoe bank, and CR Steve Sainsbury explains how The Rail Thing led to the creation of Combe Rail. Photographer Robert Darlaston shares some unpublished photos from 1963, we look at railway exhibits in North Devon museums, and we track down surviving locomotives which visited the Ilfracombe line.

NEWS

Our TawLink tramway proposal has been presented to the DCC ExeRail group, to the County Councillors along the route and to Peter Heaton-Jones MP. We are now working with NDC to commission a professional "pre-feasibility" study. This will provide independent and expert evaluation of the project's strengths, weaknesses, challenges and business case.

Railway Heritage Trail
Our Heritage Trail proposals are currently awaiting planning approval. We are in discussion with Ilfracombe Town Council to assist with delivering this project.

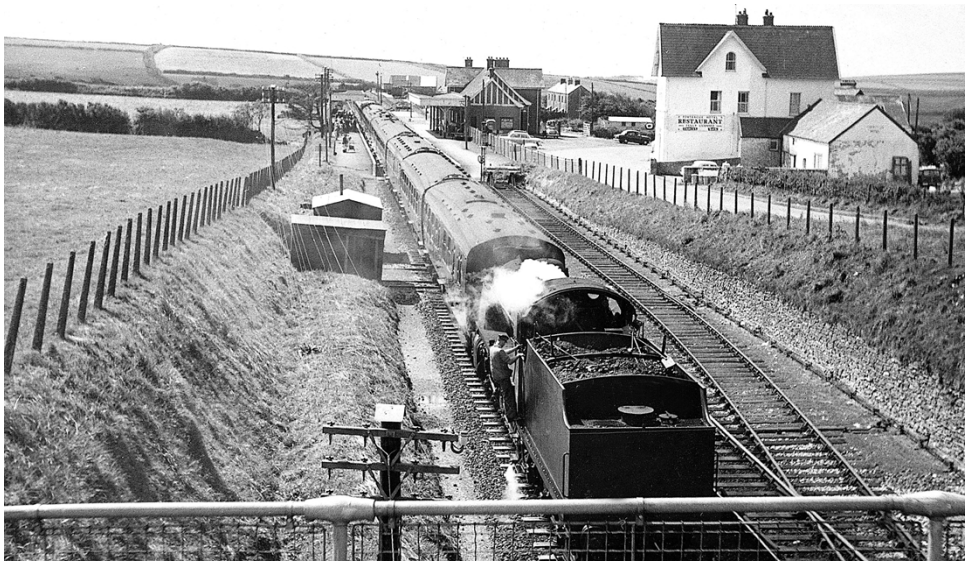
Oral History
We have started to compile an oral history of people who worked on, or had a close association with the Ilfracombe line. If you, or a member of your family, have stories to share, please get in touch! info@combe-rail.org.uk

AGM
Our Annual General Meeting will take place at 2pm on Saturday 9th September 2017.
It will take place in Ilfracombe, either at the Landmark Pavilion (which we hope will have reopened by then) or at the Lantern Centre. The AGM will be preceded, as it was last year, by a public railway exhibition.

We hope to see you there!

WORKING OVER MORTEHOE BANKS

An extract from The Ilfracombe Line *by George Reeve and John Nicholas (Irwell Press) used here by kind permission of CR George Reeve.*



On summer Saturdays, Mortehoe became a sort of West Country version of Hawes Junction, with banking engines arriving from both south and north and having to be crossed over and returned to either Braunton or Ilfracombe. However, there was no turntable, either at Braunton or Mortehoe, and so banking involved much tender-first running. It was not unknown for Bulleid Pacifics to be seen working on these duties, but on most occasions in the final years it was M7 tanks, Ivatt 2MT tanks or Maunsell Moguls.

In the down direction trains leaving Braunton station, 27ft above sea level, ascended for some six miles to arrive at Mortehoe, 624ft above sea level. Initial gradients of 1 in 74 and 1 in 96 soon stiffened to more than three miles at 1 in 41 and 1 in 40, including a sharp 16 chain radius curve through 120 degrees at Foxhunters Inn which increased the rolling resistance of a long train. Down trains leaving Braunton were able to take a run at the bank, with speeds up to 40mph (the maximum allowed on the Braunton-Mortehoe section in both directions) reached at Heddon Mill, just before the 1 in 40 commenced. A mile later, the lowest speed of the ascent was reached as the train slowed for the long Foxhunters Inn curve; speed then recovered on the straighter sections before the slowing for Mortehoe station. Braunton and Mortehoe were laid out for the attachment of assisting engines, either as pilot in front of the train engine or as banker at the rear.

Even with a fairly light train, drivers and firemen had to work together skilfully on the banks. An example of the difficulties, maybe even complacency, encountered came during the Second World War when a young inexperienced crew on M7 No.247 took the 5.15pm from Barnstaple Junction, four GWR bogies well loaded with school children returning home. The fireman had built up a very good fire in the firebox by the time they arrived at Braunton and then sat back to enjoy the view all the way up to Mortehoe. Alarmingly, just after leaving Mortehoe, the train brakes came on and following an inspection of the firebox very little fire remained. The embarrassed crew where now faced with the task of rebuilding the fire and explaining why they had let the fire and pressure get so low as to bring the train to an unscheduled halt. It was some time before enough vacuum pressure was reached before the brakes could be released but whilst cogitating their excuses it dawned on them that 25psi was necessary to release the GWR coach brakes whilst the M7 at 21psi had not been affected.

The buffer stops at Ilfracombe were 257ft above sea level but with only three miles available to reach Mortehoe the climb was even steeper, 1 in 363 and 1 in 71 along the platform itself, then 1 in 36 from the platform end for more than two miles, curving up the side of the Slade valley before the gradients eased approaching Mortehoe. Speeds up the 1 in 36 were usually no more than 15-25 mph, the fastest speeds of the ascent being reached on the easier grades just before slowing down for Mortehoe. It was easy enough to attach a pilot engine at the terminus but when a banking engine was required it had to shunt to the buffer stops *before* the carriages arrived in the platform, propelled by either the train engine or station pilot. Normal practice was for assisting engines to be detached at Mortehoe and then to work back to where they had come from for their next banking turn, although at the beginning and end of the day they worked from or to Barnstaple shed. A number of photographs record the double-heading of trains which did not require a second rear engine; this practice was preferred to light engine movements which occupied an extra path on a very busy line. Normally engines worked chimney first up the bank to maintain the maximum level of water over the crown of the firebox, but occasionally they worked tender first.

The Southern Railway Working Timetable Appendix of 1934, and the Southern Region version of 1960 provide interesting information. In 1934 the same regulations applied to both banks, Braunton-Mortehoe and Ilfracombe- Mortehoe, but in 1960 the maximum loads for each class of engine were lower for Ilfracombe-Mortehoe. In both years the absolute maximum length for passenger trains was 88 wheels, eleven bogies corresponding to the length of Ilfracombe No.2 platform. Again in both years, when the weight of the train exceeded the limit for the train engine an assisting engine was required. If the load did not exceed 280 tons the assisting engine could be attached at the front of the train, but for trains heavier than 280 tons the assisting engine had to be attached at the rear of the train. There are many recorded cases of heavy passenger trains being hauled by two or three locomotives on the banks, but to date only one example has come to light of a freight train receiving assistance; although appropriate regulations were in force freight trains were usually relatively light.

The regulations for freight trains were drawn up with different considerations, particularly the safe descent of the banks. The 1934 maximums were 11 loaded wagons including a brake van for an M7 or fifteen for an N – trains which could be hauled up the banks without undue difficulty. Unlike passenger trains, with their continuous vacuum brakes, freight trains could be stopped only by the engine brake and the brake van, so at least one 20 ton brake van was included. If any vacuum braked vehicles were included in the train they were to be marshalled next to the engine, if practicable, and the vacuum brake connected up (on one occasion, a broken coupling on a down goods led to the derailment of several runaway wagons on catch points at Heddon Mill.)

South Western Days

The Ilfracombe Goods 0-6-0s were restricted to six coaches including a brake van at each end; the first record of double headed trains of 8, 12 and 13 four wheel coaches is from 30th June and 20th July 1874. For goods trains the limit was eight wagons and a brake van. During the later South Western period Adams T1 class 0-4-4Ts were allowed to take 44 wheels unaided over the banks, while the Drummond M7s were allowed 48 wheels.

There were normally up to five through carriages, of 40 wheels, which were within these limits. The banking and pilot engine sidings at Braunton and Mortehoe were certainly in place at the time but the first record of regular double heading appears in 1919, when complaints were made about delays to pedestrians at Braunton level crossing.

Under the Southern

The summer 1925 timetable appears to have heralded the era of heavy summer trains double or triple headed over the banks. Evidence comes from photographs taken by Frank Box and Arthur Halls and also train logs by Frank Box, who recorded some 40 trips from Braunton to Mortehoe, and 64 from Ilfracombe to Mortehoe. It is unfortunate that no record has yet come to light of the train engine, pilot engine and banking engine(s), but for Southern trains it seems safe to suggest that if an N 2-6-0 was involved it was the train engine, working right through to Exeter. For the Great Western nine coach train it would appear that the 55XX 2-6-2T was the train engine, working right through to Taunton; whether both the M7 and N were banking is not clear.

Nationalisation

By this time Bulleid Pacifics were rostered for many duties and they were considerably more powerful than the locomotives previously used. But they did have a reputation for slipping due to oil leaks, insensitive regulators and springing which transferred the locomotive weight from the driving wheels to the bogie and pony truck, although the last feature was common to all Pacifics. Drivers of heavy trains starting from Ilfracombe became very skilled at getting the best out of these engines, which once on the move benefited from the free steaming boiler. They were allowed 240 tons unaided up from Braunton to Mortehoe and 205 tons from Ilfracombe to Mortehoe and these sections required more frequent relaying than others, due to the hardworking of the locomotives. No record has yet come to light of three locomotives working a train during this period. Two light Pacifics or one with an N could cope with the maximum eleven Southern bogies while a 43XX and an N with the maximum nine Great Western bogies was allowed over the Barnstaple to Taunton route.

Apart from the Devon Belle the working of heavy trains during this period was almost completely restricted to summer Saturdays, so there was no need for double heading on weekdays. The Devon Belle was a light Pacific duty from Exeter, but passengers in the observation car at the rear had an excellent view of the front end of the N or M7 banking the heavy train up to Mortehoe. Oh! to see it now...

(Photos: 1. P. Swift 2. D.W. Winkworth 3. unknown 4. P.W. Gray)

THE RAIL THING *by CR Steve Sainsbury*

Combe Rail very kindly mention that the charity was originally seeded via a Rail Thing group - Reversing Beeching - Ilfracombe. Personally it's great to see a vague idea draw a group of people together who then had the wherewithal to bite the bullet and form a society to rebuild a railway. It's happened twice before - the New S&D (New Somerset and Dorset Railway) grew out of an original Facebook group, and is now restoring the station at Midford; the Weymouth Tramway group was also sparked through a Rail Thing group. Another near miss was the Meon Valley line in Hampshire, but I still have high hopes for that line!

So what is The Rail Thing? In simple terms it's a website, a number of blogs and, at its heart, about 700 Facebook groups, which together have well over 100,000 members. It grew from just one not very successful Facebook group. I quickly realised that the original Rail Thing group was far too wide ranging to attract many people, rail fans tend to have a wide but clearly defined range of interests: narrow gauge, heritage, certain eras, certain areas, towns or counties, particular forms of traction and particular classes of locos. Buildings and structures, social history, art, literature, the variety is endless. So over the years we've added more and more groups. Membership ranges from 11,000 in the Disused Railways group down to just a few in some of the really obscure groups! As well as Rail Thing branded groups we have a growing number of Reversing Beeching groups for individual lines, some branded 'Steam' and a few that don't even mention The Rail Thing. We also cover trams, models and fundraising. You can access the world of The Rail Thing via our website at www.railthing.com

The various Facebook groups are run and maintained by a hard core of about 15 admins. We've even bigger plans for the future, we still have many countries not covered by a group, we'd like a group for each individual state in the USA, there are still hundreds of lines not covered by a Reversing Beeching group and there are many individual lines that don't yet have a group.

So does social media help to make rail revivals happen? With the three aforementioned groups (New S&D, Weymouth Quay and Combe Rail) the answer is clearly yes. But it's important that social media efforts are focussed properly. The vast majority of revivalists need to be drawn from the local population as they will obviously be keenest for a line's revival and will also form the core of volunteers and passengers in the future. So social media needs to be targetted locally, and a social media presence needs to be quickly converted into a 'real world' one otherwise it won't coalesce. It's important that people are willing to step forward and take on the roles that make a revival happen - not just the glamorous and fun ones like track laying and engine driving, but the drab ones like treasurer, secretary and social media co-ordinator!

Although I don't push it too much my own belief is that rail is on the verge of a huge revival, thanks to the twin perils of Climate Change and Peak Energy. We will need a rapid rebuilding of our rail network if we are to weather the storms (literal and figurative) that line ahead. If some of that revival comes from local people restoring their lines on the cheap and (for now) doing it on the back of current tourist expectations, then that's fine. So in a way Reversing Beeching is a bridging of both classic heritage railway and future modern light rail practice and I fully expect future rail reopenings, at least in part, to be a hybrid of the two. The important thing is to get the infrastructure in place!

There are over a hundred Reversing Beeching groups, all designed to spark rail revivals. At the moment none (other than the three mentioned above) have crossed the threshold - but some are heading towards the 300-500 members mark, where things seem to start to happen. Current frontrunners are Didcot, Newbury and Southampton, Horsham-Shoreham and Taunton-Barnstaple ...

(Editor's note - not part of the Rail Thing family, but also very popular is the Facebook group Railway to Ilfracombe....in Pictures admin CR Jon Kliem)

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THE FIVE-FIFTEEN FROM BARNSTAPLE JUNCTION

Respected railway photographer Robert Darlaston has given permission to reproduce these photos of N Class 31830 at Barnstaple Town station. The train was the 5.15 from Barnstaple Junction to Ilfracombe, on the 16th June 1961.

SURVIVING ILFRACOMBE LOCOMOTIVES

In Devon Belle #3 we mentioned that inspection saloon DB999508 (which, with loco 25063 formed the last ever train on the Ilfracombe line) has been preserved at the West Somerset Railway. Continuing this theme, we celebrate the surviving locomotives known to have travelled to Ilfracombe. If you can add any locomotives to this list, please let us know!

LSWR T9 Class
This class appeared frequently on the Ilfracombe line. 30120 is the only member to have been preserved but there is no photographic evidence of it on the Ilfracombe line.

LSWR M7 Class
This class appeared frequently on the Ilfracombe line. 30053 and 30245 have both been preserved but there is no photographic evidence of either on the Ilfracombe line.

SR N Class
Only one member of this class has been preserved, **31874**. It was often seen on the Ilfracombe line in 1961/2 and can be seen today at the Mid-Hants Railway.


(31874 at Stony Bridge, 6/9/61: Robert Darlaston)


(31874 on Mid-Hants Railway c. 2005: MHR)

GWR 43xx
The 2-6-0's were frequent visitors on services from Taunton. Only two of this numerous class have survived, 5322 & 7325 but there is no evidence of either on the Ilfracombe line.

SR West Country/Battle of Britain
Twenty of this class have been preserved, and ten of them were photographed on the Ilfracombe line (see end of article for book references):

34010	**Sidmouth**	(photo CRL Coles summer 1950 in Mitchell)
34023	**Blackmore Vale**	(photo J Shutler date? in Maggs 1)
34046	**Braunton**	(photos SC Nash 09/01/1947 & 20/06/1949 in Mitchell)
34058	**Sir Frederick Pile**	(photo RE Tustin 21/09/1954 in Nicholls)
34059	**Sir Archibald Sinclair**	(photo RJ Sellick 30/07/1951 in Nicholas)
34067	**Tangmere**	(photo PW Gray 07/07/1962 in Maggs 2)
34070	**Manston**	(photo J Scrace 09/091963 in Mitchell)
34072	**257 Squadron**	(photo PW Gray 01/09/1962 in Maggs 2)
34081	**92 Squadron**	(photo GF Heiron May 1964 in Nicholas)

The following have also been preserved. If you can find a photo of any of them working on the Ilfracombe line, please let us know.

34007 Wadebridge, 34016 Bodmin, 34027 Taw Valley, 34028 Eddystone, 34039 Boscastle, 34051 Winston Churchill, 34053 Sir Keith Park, 34073 249 Squadron, 34092 Wells, 34101 Hartland, 34105 Swanage

GWR 55xx
Another regular GW visitor, ten of this Prairie class have survived. Any Ilfracombe sightings?
5521, 5526, 5532, 5538, 5539, 5541, 5542, 5552, 5553, 5572

GWR 2251/32xx
This GW Collett 0-6-0 class is said to have visited regularly in the 1920s/30s. **3205** is the only surviving example. It visited Ilfracombe on the Exmoor Ranger railtour on 27th March 1965 and is in service today on the South Devon Railway.

LMS Ivatt 2MT
These 2-6-2 tank engines were used on the line from 1962-4. Four examples survive: 41241, 41298, 41312, 41313. Of these, **41298** was photographed at Heddon Mill on 27/07/1963 by PW Gray (Maggs 2.) It is operational today on the Isle of Wight Steam Railway.

BR Standard 4MT
Only two members of this class are thought to have visited Ilfracombe: 80039 on 12/09/1965 and 80043 on 03/10/1965 on the Exeter Flyer railtours. Neither engine has survived, though in 2016 preserved 80072 was disguised as 80043 to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the closure of the Somerset and Dorset railway.

BR Warship Class 42 diesel
Two of this class survive, **D821 Greyhound** and D832 Onslaught. D821 reached Ilfracombe on 07/09/1964 (photo Wessex Collection in Mitchell) and is currently awaiting overhaul at Old Oak Common depot.

BR Class 22 diesel
Frequent visitors to Ilfracombe, none of this class has survived. However as reported in DB #4 the Project Class 22 Society is engaged on an ambitious new-build.

BR Class 33 diesel
Only two of this class ever visited Ilfracombe, D6558 & D6566 on the WSTT Railtour on 30/08/1970. **D6566** is now preserved as **33 048** on the West Somerset Railway.

BR Class 35 Hymek
These were a regular sight at Ilfracombe from 1964-1970. Four have survived:
D7017, D7018, D7029, D7076 but no photos have emerged of any of these on the line.

BR Class 08 shunter
As reported in DB#2 the penultimate train to Ilfracombe ran on 08/02/1973 and consisted of a Class 08 shunter and two brake vans. The identity of the loco is uncertain, although it is likely to have been one of the three 08 shunters allocated to Barnstaple at the time: D4015, D4160 and one other. It would be satisfying to identify the penultimate loco to use the Ilfracombe line. If it was indeed D4015, that loco survives today and is operational at Norwich Crown Point Depot as 08 897.

Book references:
Maggs 1 & 2: *The Barnstaple and Ilfracombe Railway* by Colin Maggs, Oakwood Press (editions 1 & 2)
Mitchell: *Branch Line to Ilfracombe* by Vic Mitchell & Keith Smith - Middleton Press (1993)
Nicholas: *The Ilfracombe line* by John Nicholas - Irwell Press (1998)

RAILWAY EXHIBITS IN NORTH DEVON MUSEUMS

North Devon's local museums are reopening after the winter shut-down. We look at how the Ilfracombe-Barnstaple Railway is represented in each of them.

Museum of Barnstaple & North Devon, The Square, Barnstaple EX32 8LN
Monday - Saturday: 10am - 5pm
Tea Room: 10am - 4pm
Sunday: Closed. Admission Free

Some information and artefacts relating to the Lynton & Barnstaple railway, but very little about the Ilfracombe line.

Braunton & District Museum
Caen Street, Braunton EX33 1AA
Mon - Fri : 10am-3pm, Sat 10am-1pm
Sunday: Closed. Admission Free

Exhibits relating to Braunton station, and a superb working 4mm scale model built by CR Barry Hodgson (see Devon Belle issue #2 for feature and photos)

Mortehoe Museum, Mortehoe EX34 7DT
April-June 11am-3pm (closed Mondays & Fridays)
July & August 10am-5pm (closed Fridays)
September-October 11am-3pm (closed Mondays & Fridays)
Admission Free

A small but delightful museum, with a display of railway maps and photographs, and a 4mm scale diorama of Mortehoe station.

Ilfracombe Museum, Wilder Road,
Ilfracombe EX34 8AF
April - October Mon-Sat 10am-5pm
October - March Tu-Fri only 10am - 1pm
Closed Sundays.
Admission Adults £5, under 16s free.

The most extensive museum display relating to the Ilfracombe line, including gradient post, running-in board, totems, locomotive nameplate and, new this year, Ilfracombe Model Railway Society's 4mm scale model of the station.

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