



Combe Rail members' magazine - issue #6 Summer 2017

(Combe Rail CIO - Charitable Incorporated Organisation 1164083)

IN THIS ISSUE....



... railway draughtsman Peter Rutter recalls cabbing a Bulleid Pacific at Morteohoe when he was just three, and there are photos and a positive loco ID of the mystery penultimate train of 1973. There's a newspaper report of an ambitious narrow-gauge conversion plan from 1970, and we delve into Ilfracombe Museum's 2009 Railway Memories oral history project.

2017 AGM and Railway Exhibition

This year's AGM will take place on Saturday 9th September 2017 in The Landmark Pavilion, Ilfracombe (formal notice appears on page 2.) The Pavilion will be open to the public from 10am-4pm for a Railway Exhibition, and as last year, we have invited a variety of local railway groups including Ilfracombe Model Railway Society, Lynton and Barnstaple Railway, West Somerset Railway, Tarka Valley Railway, Bideford Railway Heritage Centre, Instow Signal



Box Tarka Rail Association and Ilfracombe and Braunton Museums. Combe Rail trustees will be on hand to meet CR members and to talk to the public about our plans. The AGM itself will start at 4pm, 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.



NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN

that the 2017 Annual General Meeting of Combe Rail CIO will be held at 4pm on Saturday 9th September 2017 at The Landmark Pavilion, Wilder Road, Ilfracombe, Devon

AGENDA

1. Introduction and apologies for absence
2. To receive and adopt the Report of the Trustees, and the Accounts for the year ended 31st July 2017
3. To elect two Trustees

Under UK charity law, two of our five Trustees must stand down at each AGM. This year, Richard Heacock (Chair) and Dan Roche (Treasurer) are standing for re-election.

4. To approve the appointment of Andrew Hedges as independent auditor

PROXY

A member is entitled to appoint another person as their proxy, to speak and vote on their behalf at the meeting. Proxy Forms and a list of Trustee candidates will be emailed to the membership on 25th August 2017.

NOMINATIONS

Any member may stand for election as a Trustee, provided they are not barred from doing so under [Charity Commission regulations](#). They must be proposed by another member, and must supply their full name, date of birth, nationality, profession and address. They should also supply a short personal statement for distribution to the membership. Nominations must be posted to: Combe Rail, Flat 5 Holly House, Avenue Road, Ilfracombe EX34 9AT, to arrive by 2pm on Wednesday 9th August 2017.

By Order of the Board
(signed) Yvonne Hin
CIO Secretary
6th July 2017

TAW LINK NEWS

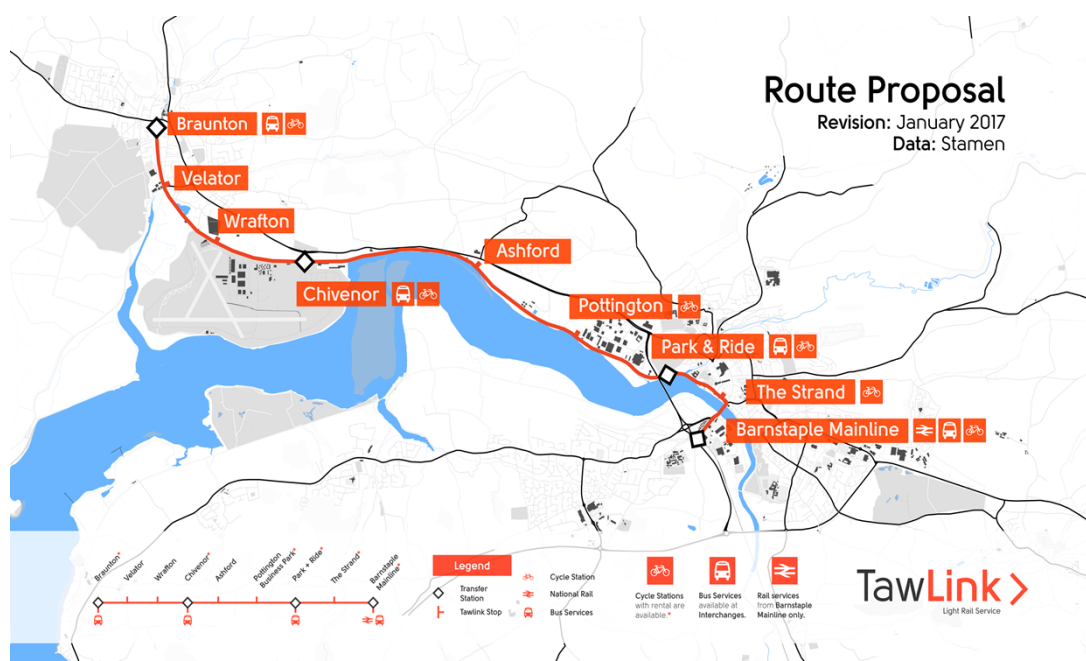


We have received proposals and quotes for a Pre-Feasibility Study from several professional rail consultants. We have discussed these proposals with NDC's Economic Development Office, who are in the process of agreeing NDC's "corporate position" on Taw Link. If NDC recognise Taw Link as an infrastructure aspiration, this will greatly improve our chances of winning funding for the Study.

As well as engaging with NDC, DCC and local Councillors, we are consulting with local stakeholders, including North Devon Public Transport Users' Group, South West Coast Path Association and Tarka Rail Association, which represents the users of the Exeter-Barnstaple railway line. We were delighted to receive the following letter of support from TRA:



Further to our conversations on the Combe Rail Taw Link proposal at the June 2017 Committee meeting of the Tarka Rail Association, I am writing to you to offer our full support to you on this matter, of connecting Braunton To Barnstaple Station (as an interchange). We see this as an important step for sustainable public transport for Northern Devon, we believe it will bring social, economic and environmental benefits to those who live, work and visit Northern Devon. I hope it will also provide a critical link from RMB Chivenor to the wider world, as much as Lympstone Commando Station does on the Avocet line. We very much look forward to working with you to get this project from the drawing board to fruition, there is great potential to provide a superb interchange at Barnstaple Station and we would love to see the forecourt area of the station revisited in terms of design, as currently at an increasing number of peak periods this area isn't fit for purpose.



MORTEHOE MEMORIES

Peter Rutter trained as a draftsman, and produced the superb line-drawings in George Pryor's "Southern Signals" (OPC, 1977.) Here he recalls a childhood encounter with a Bulleid Pacific at Morteohoe Station.



In 1947 my parents were living in Havant in Hampshire, the Hayling Island branch line ran in front of our house and even at the age of three I was hooked on trains as the 'Terrier' loco puffed by with its two LSWR non corridor coaches. I was also used to seeing brand new Bullied pacifics in their bright 'sunshine' livery up at the main line station on the daily Brighton – Plymouth through train.

In that summer we took a holiday in Woolacombe and I was fortunate to be taken up to the little station of Morteohoe & Woolacombe. Seventy years later I can still remember seeing the locos storming up the banks before pausing at the station. My father took the attached photos on a pre-war Kodak folding bellows camera. I was lucky to be invited on the footplate and although I was slightly intimidated by the huge machine, the driver was very kindly. I guess the fireman was recovering from firing up such steep gradients.

My parents told me many years later that at least one of the trains in the photos was the Ilfracombe portion of the 'Devon Belle' which was introduced in that year. The top loco could be any one of five built before summer 1947 with the final digit 4: Yeovil, Budleigh Salterton, Tamar Valley, Honiton or Woolacombe. The bottom loco was 21C109 Lyme Regis.

On that same holiday the local council were re-surfacing the road nearby using a classic steam roller. The smell of hot tar still reminds me of that wonderful time.

In 1963 I started work in Christchurch, and for the next four years I was able to see the Bullied pacifics working out their last days as the Bournemouth – Waterloo line was electrified. I met my wife at this time and we married in 1967.

In 1988 we took a touring holiday in North Devon and stayed a couple of nights in a small hotel overlooking Woolacombe beach. Whilst there I checked out the old station. By then the line had been closed between Barnstaple and Ilfracombe. The station had become a children's theme park called 'Once upon a Time' using some BR mk1 coaches and redundant goods vans.

I now live in retirement in Swindon and volunteer on the P-way gang at the Swindon & Cricklade heritage railway. I still see Bullied pacifics occasionally on the main lines here pulling steam charter specials.



THE PENULTIMATE TRAIN - 8th February 1973



As reported in Devon Belle issues 2 & 5, the last-but-one train to use the Ilfracombe line was a salvage train consisting of a class 08 shunter and two brake vans. Its purpose was, allegedly, to retrieve smaller, salvageable items from the stations - although we would be pleased to receive any further information.

This contemporary newspaper cutting resurfaced recently on Facebook. "FIRST FOR TWO YEARS" is approximate - the previous train to run was the very last service train, on 3rd October 1970.

In previous DB articles, we speculated as to the identity of the 08 shunter, likely candidates being D4160, D4015 and another, all shedded at Barnstaple at the time.

Ken Baker recently shared his own photo of the salvage train at Barnstaple Town Station, and was able to confirm the shunter's identity as D4160.



Sadly this means that the last-but-one loco to use the line has not survived. D4160 was renumbered 08 930, it was withdrawn in February 1990 and met its end at MC Metal Processing in Glasgow in June 1991.

AND TALKING OF UNUSUAL LOCOMOTIVES...



This Graham Jenkins photo recently appeared on Facebook, showing Class 52 D1012 "Western Firebrand" at Braunton. The lifted down line in the photo dates it to 1967-1970, and the Western was reportedly covering for a failed loco on a paper train. If you have any further information, please email info@combe-rail.org.uk

NARROW-GAUGE TO ILFRACOMBE?

Peter Christie of the North Devon Journal has been painstakingly scanning NDJ back issues and posting various articles to Facebook history groups. This article obviously dates from early-to-mid 1970, at a time when the line closure had already been announced. Whilst details of the proposal itself are thin on the ground, the article does reveal two interesting things about how people were thinking at the time. Firstly that there was money to be made from Ffestiniog and Talylyn-style narrow-gauge railways in attractive tourist locations. Secondly, there is no suggestion of crossing the Taw to an interchange at Barnstaple (Junction) Station. In fact, the Taw railway bridge isn't mentioned at all (had it already been declared unfit for further use?) and the inconvenience of the existing railway to Shapland and Petter is cited as another reason to close the BR railway. Lord Wakefield must have had his reasons...

Narrow-line railway to Ilfracombe in view

A STRONG possibility that the Barnstaple - Ilfracombe railway line might be turned into narrow gauge and operated by a private company as a holiday attraction emerged yesterday.

British Rail confirmed last night that they have been approached over the idea and they are regarding it as "an additional factor" in their plans to dispose of the line after October.

The Rail Board would be naturally inclined to examine such a scheme in terms of selling out to the best all-round advantage.

Businessmen in North Devon and further afield have been quick to grasp the potential of thousands of paying customers on the line during the summer season.

And one business in particular, the Shapland and Petter woodwork manufacturers, is most anxious for other reasons for a quick picture of the future of the line to emerge.

Town Station terminus

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Should a narrow-gauge company push through a deal with British Rail, and the rail authorities will be looking for the highest bidder, the chances would be high for the Town Station to become the Barnstaple terminus.

This would leave Shapland and Petter free to improve their road access across the present rail line at Raleigh Works, between the Town and Junction stations.

This is a crucial factor for Shapland and Petter, who say they must have the new access for their £100,000 current factory development and that 200 new jobs hinge on it.

Lord Wakefield, who is on the Shapland and Petter board, is chairman of the 100-year-old Ravenglass and Eskdale miniature railway in the Lake District.

From London yesterday he said: "I have no proposals regarding the Ilfracombe line at this stage because as far as I am aware the line has not yet been offered for sale."

Inquiry received

"Until it is possible for anyone to make any offers I and anyone else would be wasting time in promulgating proposals. One would need to know what land was available and whether sections would be required for other purposes, including road improvements."

A British Rail spokesman at Bristol said: "Enquiries by Lord Wakefield and by other people are before the board; in fact there are a number of applications from interested parties."

"The closure, however, is not until October and we have not yet received permission from the Minister of Transport to effect a sale. Before then, of course, there are also a number of other considerations to be gone into."

MUSEUM MEMORIES

In November 2009 Ilfracombe Museum's then director Sue Pullen organised two "memory sessions", inviting former railwaymen, and former users of the Ilfracombe line to meet at the museum and share memories. This oral history project was typed up, and you can read it in the museum today, in a folder in the railway display called "Ilfracombe Memories". We are grateful to Ilfracombe Museum for permission to reproduce this extract.

Garfield Spear

My story starts when I joined in 1947 at the Barnstaple Locomotive Power Depot as a cleaner, and by the time we got to 1969 I had worked my way up through the ranks, so to speak, i.e. cleaner, Fireman, Passed Foreman which meant I was allowed to be in charge of a steam engine, and finally reached the dizzy heights of Driver. In those days you had to gain your knowledge in your own time, voluntarily to enable you to pass your driver's exam, which was very tough. You had to know the complete workings of a steam engine and to be able to nurse your train home in the event of a minor breakdown. We had a Rulebook of 240 rules that applied to both locomotive staff, station staff and signalmen. Although my home depot was Barnstaple Junction my association with Ilfracombe was due to the fact that I had to go down there to cover staff sicknesses and holidays.

It was really hot in the cab. I wish I'd had a thermometer. I bet you it was over 100 degrees. When you were making up the fire you had to screw up your eyes, it was so bright. We had to check to see if there was a hole in the fire and be ready to shovel the coal in. The companionship on the railway was second to none. Other drivers that I remember were Reg Ackland, George Tucker, Ernie Thorne and later Ivor Goody. The firemen I remember were Les Perrin, George Hooper, George Knill, Cyril Knott and Michael James.

Also I remember, the turntable at Ilfracombe was 65 feet in diameter, installed in about 1925, one of only four in the Southern Region and it was fitted with roller bearings and hand-operated, If the engine was balanced correctly, children could push the engine round, some 100 tons. Sometimes the local kids would come up and help the drivers and firemen to do it. One night I remember there was a gale blowing and the engine crews started to turn the engine but the wind got hold of it and despite putting the brakes on the turntable they couldn't stop it and resorted to throwing in 6 foot sleepers to stop it and eventually did, but the turntable was so finely balanced and ran so freely.



(Photo TB Owen: 34072 13th July 1963)

Mike James

I'm the last surviving fireman from the Ilfracombe shed when it closed. I started in 1955 and finished in 1968. I had to maintain a full head of steam observing all signals. I'd prepare the engine, prepare the fire, check and fill the sandboxes. I used to look forward to going to work. I started at the Barnstaple shed and came to Ilfracombe in 1959. On the summer Saturdays most of the visitors arrived by train and every place seemed to do Bed and Breakfast.

Brindley Prust

I worked on the railway from June 1942 to about 1970. I was a fireman and engine driver. About 1948 I was the fireman on the engine when the turntable kept going round because it was blowing a gale. 105 ton engine you could push round with one hand! Tom Davey was the driver.

Another time, an overloaded goods train with concrete sleepers and rail pulled by 1842 engine went in the tunnel too slow and the exhaust vapour hit the tunnel roof and sulphur fumes were everywhere. There was a shock blast and one of the men fell on the floor, we thought he was dead. He couldn't breathe because of the fumes. He was taken to the Tyrrell Hospital. He was an ex-Air Force boy. I think he packed it in after that. You'd get icicles in the tunnels. Crash, bang, wallop they'd hit the safety glass. One time it broke and there was blood all over us and we had to go to hospital. Sometimes we used to cook bacon and eggs on the shovel. We'd wash to coal shovel and put it just inside the firebox. Sometimes we'd cook herrings. As a joke we'd send a new apprentice into the office to get the "key to the smoke box."



(31837 climbs Ilfracombe bank. Photographer unknown)

Ilfracombe Museum is open April - October Mon-Sat 10am-5pm and October - March Tu-Fri only 10am - 1pm. Closed Sundays. Admission Adults £5, under 16s free
(Photos: CR Tony Olsson)