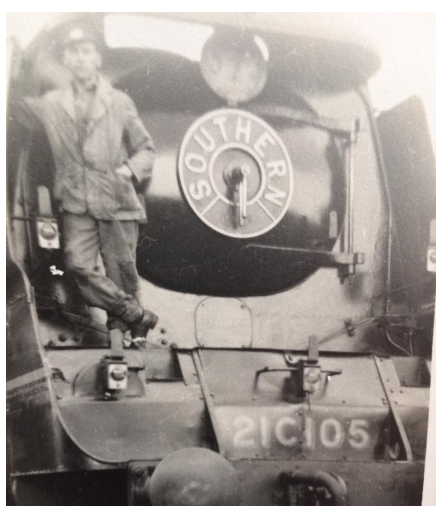


Combe Rail members' magazine - issue #8 Winter 2018

(Combe Rail CIO - Charitable Incorporated Organisation 1164083)

www.combe-rail.org.uk

info@combe-rail.org.uk



IN THIS ISSUE....

... we have photos of fireman Peter Runnals (pictured L on 21C105 "Barnstaple") working at Barnstaple and Ilfracombe in 1947, there's an account from Driver Brian Steer of taking his fireman's exam in 1958 on 34007 "Wadebridge", we enjoy an afternoon's trainspotting with John Bradbeer in Braunton in 1960, and there's a new line of enquiry in the ongoing search for Ilfracombe station's missing benches.

COMBE RAIL NEWS

With the co-operation of Braunton Parish Council, we have taken on our first piece of railway infrastructure on the line. Situated by Signal Court flats on Station Road, this home signal was installed by Derek Goodwin in 2009. The post is LSWR lattice and was sourced from WSR at Bishop's Lydeard. The arm has been identified as BR(SR.) The signal will remain the property of the Parish Council and Combe Rail will maintain it. The Braunton signal becomes the first location on our Railway Interpretation Trail. A QR code on the signal will link smartphone users to a YouTube video slideshow showing Braunton Gates crossing in its heyday.



(photo Robert McConnell)

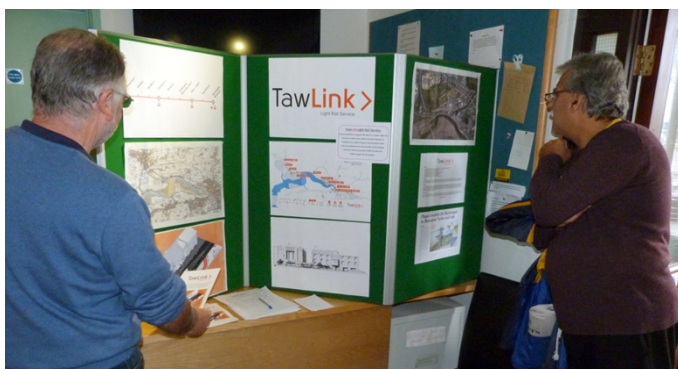
TAW LINK NEWS



Since the last issue of Devon Belle, TawLink has officially "gone public." CR Barry Hodgson launched the TawLink display in Braunton Parish Hall on 11th November for Braunton Museum's 'Craft and Coffee' morning. The display then transferred to Braunton Museum for three weeks, and all the Parish and District Councillors along the TawLink route were invited to attend. The display was then seen at Braunton U3A, Christmas Market and Church Rooms, and TawLink information leaflets are still available at Braunton Library.

Our petition (urging NDC to commission a pre-feasibility study for TawLink) proved a successful and popular way of engaging the public. In addition to the four pages of signatures collected in Ilfracombe in September, there are now a further ten pages from Braunton!

An online version of the petition is available [here](#). If you haven't already done so, please sign!



Meanwhile at the other end of the TawLink line, Barnstaple Chamber of Commerce invited CR Trustees John Burch and David Luggar to their AGM on 16th November. There was much interest in the TawLink proposal, and many guests took away TawLink information leaflets,

Even further down the line (the Tarka Line!) CR Trustee Richard Heacock gave a TawLink presentation in Crediton on 25th November. This was to the Devon and Cornwall branch of Railfuture - the principal campaigning organisation for rail re-openings. The presentation was well received, searching questions were asked, and useful contacts were made with OkeRail, the group campaigning for the restoration of a regular passenger service to Okehampton.



With local public opinion now strongly behind our proposal, we will press NDC to recognise TawLink in the Local Plan, and to commission the essential pre-feasibility study. We are not, incidentally, expecting cash-strapped NDC to pay for the (ca. £10k) study - merely to act as its official sponsor. With NDC as official sponsor, various sources of funding become accessible

MEMORIES OF "WADEBRIDGE"

In DB#7 we asked whether readers could find photographic evidence on the Ilfracombe line of ten of the surviving twenty Bulleid light pacifics. Peter Richards wrote in, with verbal (rather than photographic) evidence of 34007 "Wadebridge" having worked to Ilfracombe. Fireman Brian Steer's recollections (below) were published in "Out of the Mists of Time" (2007) to celebrate the return to steam of 34007. We are grateful to Peter and to [Wadebridge \(34007\) Locomotive Limited](#) for allowing us to reproduce this extract.

Brian Steer is the son of a typical railway family, his grandfather was a Signaller, his father a Foreman and his uncle a Guard. Starting on the railway in late 1956 as a junior Porter at Barnstaple Junction station he then, after a year, transferred to the Locomotive side at the shed there and has several memories of working on WADEBRIDGE's footplate. Although the locomotive had been transferred from Exmouth Junction to Nine Elms in 1951, she obviously enjoyed brief returns to the West Country. Brian's first memory of working on WADEBRIDGE's footplate is from 1958, when he took his Fireman's Exam on 34007. He climbed onto the footplate at Yeoford to fire to Ilfracombe, then back to Barnstaple. Inspector Edgar Snow was on the footplate with him, whilst the Exeter Fireman he had taken over from went back to ride in a coach.



(34007 at Okehampton on 28/03/1965 photo Michael Messenger)

He looked in the firebox and his heart sank as the fire looked like red sand. The coal in the tender was small and very wet as it had been watered to keep the dust down. The Driver just said to Brian, "Do your best, we have only five coaches on". Brian used the pricker and dart all the way and they managed to climb safely from Braunton up to Morthoe, after which it was plain sailing downhill to Ilfracombe.

There was a 1 1/2 hour layover at Ilfracombe and Brian spent that time throwing out all the clinker and trying to find some decent lumps of coal in the tender. Leaving Ilfracombe he had a much better journey back to Barnstaple where Inspector Snow first headed for the Loco Shed for a cup of tea before giving Brian an examination on the Rules and Regulations, which he passed. Inspector Snow gave him a cigarette, shook him by the hand, said that not many locos would have kept going with a fire in that state and then made his way back to Exeter on the next train.

Another memory of 34007, again at Barnstaple, is from early 1959 when Driver Wilf Cooper, with passed Fireman Peter Runnels, invited Brian to go for a ride on the 7:37 a.m. from Barnstaple, changing engines at Kings Nympton and then working a goods train back to Barnstaple with an N class mogul. On leaving Barnstaple Peter Runnels asked him to put some coal in the firebox. Brian opened the firebox doors but all he could see was a firebox full of black coal, so he said to Peter Runnels, "The box is full up". Peter Runnels then said to the Driver, "drop her over a bit on the reverser Wilf". Driver Cooper checked his watch, said they were running about two minutes ahead of time, the boiler pressure was about 240 lbs and the steam chest pressure 70-80 lbs and that she was flying along. He reduced the steam pressure to about 50-60 lbs after which Brian did manage to put some coal in the firebox. He reckons that the Fireman who took over at Kings Nympton would not have needed to leave his seat all the way to Exeter!

A third memory is again with Peter Runnals at Barnstaple, when they worked six coaches and a bogie van to Ilfracombe. Peter Runnals suggested they needed a bank engine from Braunton but Brian said 34007 was steaming and pulling so well that they wouldn't need one. WADEBRIDGE flew up the bank with a full head of steam and a full boiler. Then, having worked the train to Ilfracombe, they returned to Braunton for banking duties. WADEBRIDGE was, says Brian, a gem of an engine!

34007 is currently out-of-ticket but can be seen at Ropley shed on the Mid Hants Railway

FIREMAN PETER C. RUNNALS IN 1946

By happy coincidence, in the same week that we received the "Wadebridge" story (above) some photographs were posted online of fireman Peter Runnals. We contacted Peter's son Colin, who kindly gave permission to use the photos. Colin said his father was born in 1926, and started at Barnstaple Junction Shed, probably in 1940. Peter's brother Ken was also a Barnstaple Junction fireman. Colin (b.1950) recalls several footplate rides with his father to Ilfracombe and back - including turning on the turntable. Obviously this was against regulations, so Peter only offered rides after dark when he was on evening shifts. When Barnstaple shed closed in 1964, Peter was offered a transfer to Newton Abbott, but his children were settled at school in Barnstaple and he didn't want to uproot them, so he left the railway. Colin thinks the photos were taken in 1946 and 1947, and that the driver was Jack Collins.



On an M7 loco at Barnstaple



Beside M7 670 at Ilfracombe - with Station Master?



Ready to leave Ilfracombe with up "Devon Belle"



In the cab of an M7 loco

TRAINSPOTTING AT BRAUNTON by John Bradbeer

I used to cycle to Braunton from home in Barnstaple on summer Saturdays and watch the trains leave to head up over Morteohoe. The idea was to see the ACE leave Braunton, often with a Bulleid pacific at each end and never anything smaller than an N as banker. In 1963 I did keep a log of one of these visits (below.) There was no N on a passenger train in that listing. There is a Churchward 43XX with a banker and the story of this is that it was really struggling even with just four coaches (as far as I could tell one of the cylinder glands was leaking badly) and while the station master was reluctant to give them a banker, the engine men were adamant that they were not leaving for Morteohoe without one, which they did get. Barnstaple Junction's tank engines in the early 1960s - initially Ivatt class 2 and three M7s and then only the class 2s - were all kept facing in the down direction so that they could shunt the yard boiler-first, and thus they could go straight into the banker sidings at Braunton. The engines sent to Ilfracombe would be turned there so as to face up the bank. All Bulleid pacifics in North Devon were turned at Ilfracombe on arrival (*because Barnstaple turntable wasn't long enough - Ed*) even if they spent a night on Barnstaple Junction shed afterwards. So if a Bulleid pacific was sent to Braunton for banking, then it would be one at Barnstaple already but still facing in the down direction and probably kept back deliberately for the purpose.

Photos at Braunton 6th August 1960



Ivatt Class 2 41298 returns after banking to Morteohoe



A down train departs with M7 30253 banking



N Class 31841 calls with an up passenger service



N Class pilots 34061 "73 Squadron" departing up



Braunton 1960. 34002 "Salisbury" pilots 34106 "Lydford" up Ashford 1962 34078 "222 Squadron" up



Braunton 1963. GW 6327 arrives down past Ivatt tank Barnstaple Junction 1963 34080 "74 Squadron" up

Spotting notes at BRAUNTON, Saturday 27 July 1963

<i>Time</i>	<i>Locomotives</i>	<i>Direction</i>	<i>Description</i>
14-12	34106, 41283 (B)	Down	08-35 Waterloo-Ilfracombe
14-35	34072	Up	14-10 Ilfracombe-Waterloo
15-11	34002	Down	10-15 Waterloo-Ilfracombe
15-19	34075 (P), 34069	Up	14-55 Ilfracombe-Waterloo
15-30	6346, 41298 (B)	Down	08-00 Wolverhampton-Ilfracombe
16-00	41283	Up	Ilfracombe-Barnstaple Jct freight
16-08	34079, 31846 (B)	Down	11-00 Waterloo-Ilfracombe (ACE)
16-20	41298	Up	Light from Mortehoe
16-24	6327, 41298 (B)	Down	13-57 Taunton-Ilfracombe
16-45	31846	Up	Light from Mortehoe
17-14	34002 (P), 34106	Up	16-50 Ilfracombe-Exeter Central

B banker engine

P pilot engine

IMPORTANT ARTEFACT FOUND? by CR John Burch

There is perhaps no more important a piece of infrastructure at a railway station than that which allows customers to rest their weary legs in comfort while waiting for their train to arrive. That might be especially true where the journey to the station has been up a steep hill and steep flight of steps.

A couple of years ago I joined a voluntary group who look after the woodland area overlooking the Ilfracombe station site known as The Cairn. This area was created during Victorian times as a recreation ground with pretty walkways and a viewpoint overlooking the whole Slade Valley area. This can be seen in many old photos of the railway at Ilfracombe. The walkway leading up to Cairn Top has a shelter for the weary traveller to rest their legs before continuing the climb. In this shelter are 3 bench seats. After I had been joining the bi-weekly Cairn Conservation Carer working parties for a few weeks the members got to know of my interest in the old railway line. These bench sets came up in conversation and one of the long serving members of the group said to me that they understood the bench seats had originally been located at Ilfracombe station. I became very interested and decided to investigate further.



Ilfracombe station appears to have had several bench seats to satisfy the demands of its customers. In the collection of photos I have of Ilfracombe station, there appears to be evidence of at least 3 bench seats. There is one quite old photo taken from the end of the platforms in the snow looking towards the Slade Valley. In this photo there is one bench seat up against a gas lamp. This appears to be prior to the SR station rebuild in the 1920s.



Two bench seats often appear situated outside the building housing the booking hall and small shop at the front of the station. One, and sometimes two, bench seats also appear in some photos adjacent to the ticket collector's box on platform 2 behind the booking hall.

Other, apparently more recent, photos show two bench seats on the platform in front of the luggage in advance storage area at the end of platform 1.

In these photos there does not appear to be a bench by the ticket collector's box. Clearly the bench seats were movable and were shunted about to different locations by station staff over the years. I have yet to find any photo where more than 3 benches appear together. So I began to think there may be something in this story that the seats in the shelter were actually saved from the station. I decided to have a closer look.





The benches in the shelter are indeed painted green and look very railway-like. They are most certainly not movable now having been bolted to the ground to keep them secure – which is probably a good thing.

Unfortunately there are only two back supports on the Cairn shelter benches whereas all the Ilfracombe railway bench seats show three back support rails. Closer examination of the metalwork shows them to be of a different design

to those in the various photos of Ilfracombe station. Then I got to thinking that perhaps someone may have refurbished the seats when they were moved so I decided to have a closer look. There appeared to be an extra rivet blank about where the additional back support would be. I wondered whether perhaps the support rail had been removed at some point. There was also evidence of a faded railway green at the inaccessible back of the Cairn seats suggesting they have always been green and not just painted in recent years.

Then some further photographic evidence of the Ilfracombe seats came to light and the theory was completely scuppered. These show that the Ilfracombe station bench seats have an additional standing support and also a fourth bottom seat support rail. None of the Cairn seats have these, so the story seems to be incorrect unless there were other railway bench seats not seen in any of the old railway photos. They may perhaps have come from another railway location.

However all is not lost. In August 2017 I paid another visit to the Lynton and Barnstaple Railway's Snapper Halt to see how work had progressed on the excellent restoration of the track bed and buildings here. I was astonished to find, on the platform, a beautifully restored bench seat which looks exactly like the Ilfracombe station seats. I remember being told that the Lynton & Barnstaple Railway group had rescued a number of items from the Ilfracombe line when it closed and wonder whether they perhaps rescued the bench seats from Ilfracombe? On 8th February 1973, diesel shunting loco D4160 towed a recovery train to collect loose objects after the line had closed. It is almost certain that it collected moveable bench seats, weighing machines and other such objects.



I have studied other photos and there is evidence of similar long bench seats at Barnstaple Town, Braunton and Morteohoe stations. They all appear to bear a plate with the station name on the centre of the top rail of the back supports. At least one of the Ilfracombe seats was so plated. The Snapper seat appears to have faint evidence under the paint of a possible plate position. So the mystery may yet be solved. I will ask our friends at the Lynton and Barnstaple Railway whether they did indeed rescue any of the bench seats amongst the items that were recovered. Perhaps if you rest your weary legs on the bench at Snapper Halt you may be sitting where once, an Ilfracombe passenger did the same.

(Photos: 1) Cairn benches 2017, John Burch 2) Ilfracombe station c1965, Trevor & Des Rossi 3) Ilfracombe station c1969, John Mann collection 4) Ilfracombe station 30/03/1970, Terry Tracey 5) Snapper Halt L&BR 2017, John Burch.)
