SOUTHERN GONE WEST

A busy scene at Halwill Junction on 31st August 1964. BR Class 4 4-6-0 No.75022 is approaching with the 8.48am from Padstow, while Class 4 2-6-4T No.80037 waits to proceed with the 10.00 Okehampton–Padstow. The diesel railcar is an arrival from Torrington. (Peter W. Gray)

THE NORTH CORNWAL

BY DAVID THROWER

The area served by the North Cornwall line has always epitomised the contradiction of trying to serve a remote and sparsely-populated (by English standards) area with a railway. It is no surprise to introduce this portrait of the North Cornwall line by emphasising that railways mostly came very late to this part of Cornwall — and left early. The entire life of the North Cornwall line spanned little more than seven decades.

Followers of this series of articles have seen how railways which were politically aligned with the London & South Western Railway progressively stretched out to grasp Barnstaple and Ilfracombe, and then to reach Plymouth via Okehampton, with a branch to Holsworthy, the latter eventually being extended to Bude. The Holsworthy line included a station at a remote spot, Halwill, which was to become the junction for the final push into North Cornwall.

The LSWR had already long maintained a presence in the Far West, from 1846, in the shape of the ancient Bodmin & Wadebridge Railway, of which more on another occasion. The purchase of the B&WR, deep in the heart of the Great Western Railway's territory, acted as psychological pressure upon the LSWR to link the remainder of the system to it as part of a wider drive into central Cornwall to tap

Smile, please! A moorland sheep poses for the camera, oblivious to SR N Class 2-6-0 No.31846 heading west from Tresmeer with the Padstow coaches of the 'Atlantic Coast Express' on the last stage of their long journey from Waterloo on 22nd August 1964. (Peter W. Gray)

L LINE PART ONE

passenger and mineral traffic in particular. For the rest of the century the LSWR camp therefore had to relentlessly press on westwards to reach the B&WR — and capture as much as possible of the territory which lay between — rather like some advancing but slow-moving army relieving a distant town under siege.

However, much of the way from Halwill, and from civilisation back at Okehampton, was decidedly barren country, being used for hill farming. There was only one town, Launceston, until you reached Wadebridge. Moreover, the coastline was rocky, with few bays, and its geology and remoteness made it unsuitable for major holiday resorts.

The population of this area, even by the mid-twentieth century, was to remain stubbornly low. Between Halwill and Padstow, the four towns and villages were Launceston (4,700), Camelford (1,300), Wadebridge (3,300) and Padstow (2,900). To the west, along the coast, there was Boscastle (900), Tintagel (1,600), Port Isaac (1,000) and the very minor coastal villages of Trevone, Rock

Peace and quiet at remote Ashwater station, looking west on 22nd August 1964. Set in its tranquil wooded valley, the station was only accessible by narrow country lanes.
(Peter W. Gray)

A view looking eastwards along the down platform at Halwill Junction on 16th June 1926, with Southern Railway Maunsell N Class Mogul No.840, at this time still only two years old, standing with the 4.10pm Okehampton to Padstow service, with additional stock (probably for a Bude service) in the down bay platform. The locomotive, as BR No.31840, was withdrawn for scrapping in 1964.
(H. C. Casserley)

Drummond LSWR T9 4-4-0 No.30711 stands at Wadebridge on 18th May 1959 with the 12.45pm Padstow to Waterloo service, due into Waterloo about seven hours later behind a Bulleid Pacific. Small communities such as Padstow and Wadebridge were still enjoying truly excellent long-distance links and comfortable rolling stock, courtesy of the Southern, even if there were numerous stops on the long sections west of Exeter. However, the beginning of the end of the legendary and much-loved 'Greyhounds' was in sight and this T9 was withdrawn just three months later.
(J. S. Gilks)

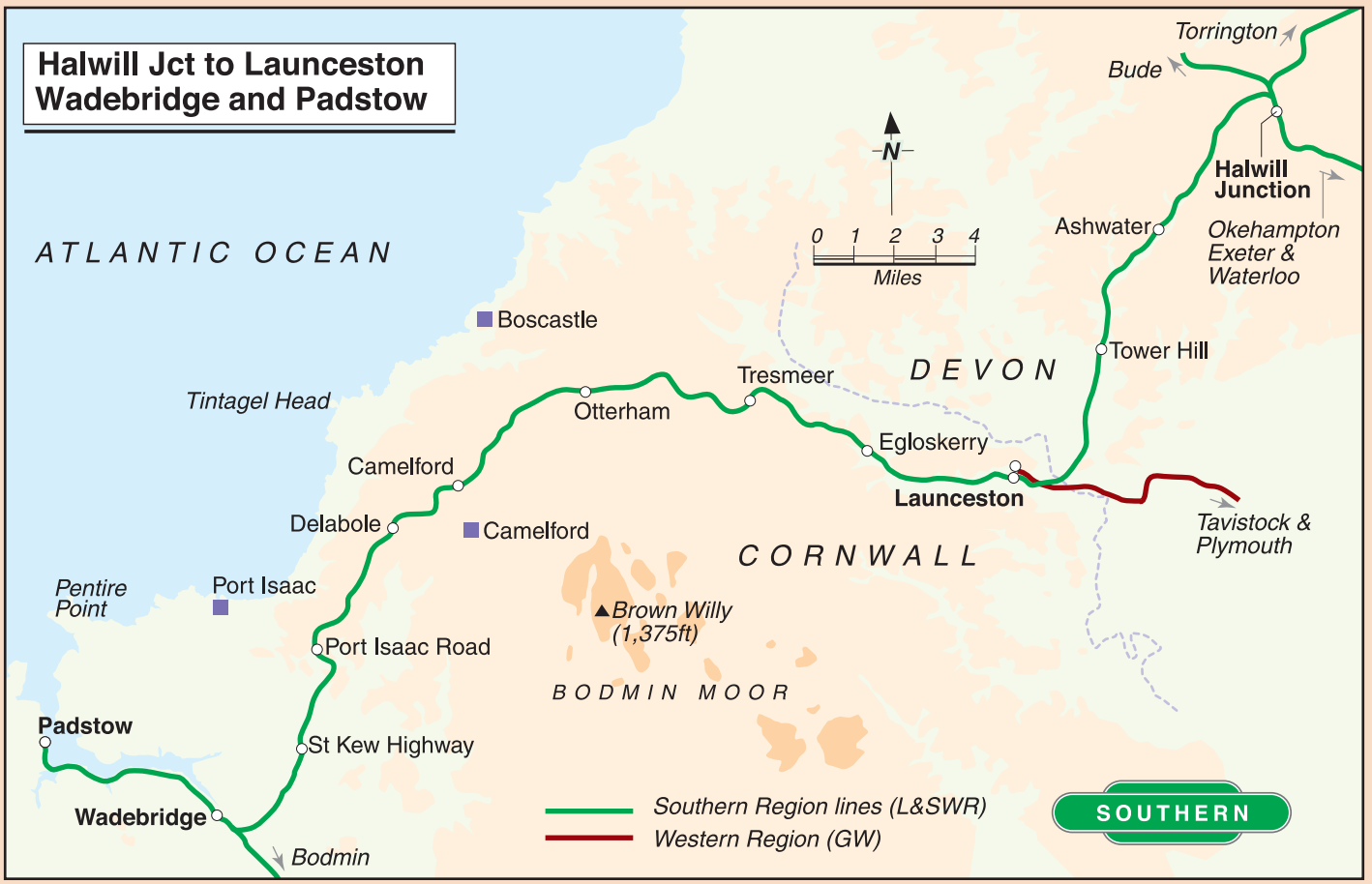
and Polzeath, totalling perhaps a further 4,500 inhabitants. The rest was scattered villages, hamlets and isolated farms. This was thin gruel indeed.

It is therefore no surprise that the LSWR was, in truth, in no real hurry to colonise the territory as its own, nor that the later Western Region of British Railways was to be equally anxious to withdraw from it just as soon as it could. The years of the LSWR, Southern Railway and BR Southern Region were therefore to see the area's all-too-brief golden age of rail travel.

Early days

The LSWR's progress west of Exeter towards its newly-acquired Bodmin & Wadebridge line was to be one of the slowest pieces of railway-building ever, taking the remainder of the century to complete. The company had reached Okehampton by 1871 and in 1879 the completion of the line from Okehampton to Halwill and Holsworthy had given it the chance for a further southward push towards Launceston.

The LSWR had already previously made a lengthy but unsuccessful attempt to reach the town by a wholly different route. From 1864 until 1870 the Central Cornwall Railway had been trying to reach Launceston from Truro, via Ruthernbridge, with LSWR backing as part of an attempt to penetrate the GWR's monopoly west of Plymouth, but the powers had lapsed with the line unbuilt. In 1880 the GWR had also tried its hand at penetrating the area and attempted unsuccessfully to promote a route northwards from Fowey through Ruthernbridge to Delabole. This would have been to transport slate and clay from the area to Fowey. The Mid-Cornwall Railway was proposed to link St. Dennis via St. Columb to



Padstow but this scheme, too, was defeated in the House of Lords in 1882.

The LSWR's response to the Mid-Cornwall scheme was to attempt once more to capture the territory from the north. In August 1882 the North Cornwall Railway was granted Parliamentary powers to build a line from Halwill, on the Holsworthy route, to Wadebridge and Padstow. The route was selected to minimise tunnelling, with a ruling gradient of about 1 in 75. Agreements were reached in the same year between the LSWR and the North Cornwall for the former to work the line. The long-term plan was to eventually press on further westwards from Padstow to Newquay or Truro, but those aspirations ended in 1896–97 when a truce with the GWR was declared.

Finance for the North Cornwall, for what promised from the outset to be a fairly costly and difficult railway to build, with only very modest traffic prospects, was raised by dividing the line into four separate financial undertakings, each covering respectively the Halwill–Launceston, Launceston–Delabole, Delabole–Wadebridge and Wadebridge–Padstow sections. Each of these undertakings then had its own separate working agreement with the LSWR company.

Many years later, in 1912, the new General Manager of the LSWR, Herbert Walker, rationalised these financial arrangements into a single agreement, authorised by Parliament, with the LSWR paying an annual rental for the North Cornwall line of £25,250. Finally, immediately before the three main Southern companies were amalgamated in 1923 to form the Southern Railway, the North Cornwall Railway was absorbed by the LSWR in November 1922, having by this time become its largest shareholder. The North Cornwall company was then wound up in March 1923.

Construction

Returning to 1884, construction of the central section of the North Cornwall line required some heavy earthworks, particularly south of Egloskerry, despite making the best use of river valleys that it could, and the directors of the London & South Western Railway must have wondered at times quite what they had let themselves in for. Construction lasted fifteen years, from mid-1884 till early 1899. The route was built as a single track but (somewhat over-optimistically) with numerous double track clearances.

Construction of the first section, from Halwill to Launceston, started on 20th June 1884. Contractors for the line were Curry and Reeve, usually employing 600–800 men at any one time. The completed line to Launceston was inspected on 15th July 1986 and opened on 21st July 1886. However, there were certain niggling criticisms and a 25mph speed limit was imposed, which must have taken the shine off matters. This lasted until February 1887.

Construction of the next section commenced in November 1890, still with Curry and Reeve as contractors. There were problems in the Tresmeer area, where shale proved unstable, and the subsequent landslip delayed the completion of the Launceston–Tresmeer section. Inspection was on 27th July 1892 and opening followed the next day, though Egloskerry station wasn't opened until 3rd October. Again, there was an initial speed limit of 25mph due to the lack of a turntable at Tresmeer.

Inspection of the next short section, from Tresmeer to Delabole, was on 8th August 1893. Tresmeer to Camelford was opened on 14th August 1893, but the section beyond to Delabole was unfortunately still unfinished. This latter was inspected again by the Board of Trade and opened on 18th October 1893, though this time the authorised initial speed limit was only 20mph. Construction pressed on and Delabole to Port Isaac Road was inspected on 1st August 1894 and once again passed for 20mph operation, this time because of there not being a turntable at Port Isaac Road. Partly due to this, the LSWR chose not to open the section to traffic.

Work proceeded on Port Isaac Road to St. Kew Highway and by November 1894 the sole tunnel on the line, at Trelil, was largely complete. Inspection of Port Isaac Road to Wadebridge took place on 29th May 1895 and Delabole to Wadebridge opened on 1st June 1895. The inspector, however, was still unhappy with Wadebridge's layout and it was rebuilt subsequently for the Padstow extension. The Wadebridge extension was officially opened on 12th June.

In July 1896 powers were granted to extend the line to Padstow, with Curry and Reeve remaining the contractors. Work began in December 1896, the extension was inspected on 20th March 1899 and the line was approved, subject to the provision of a turntable at Padstow. The extension was formally opened on 23rd March 1899, accompanied by a 21-gun salute from the quayside.

Interestingly, in January 1903 a further railway route — the Padstow, Bedruthan & Mawgan — was authorised. No progress was ever made with the scheme, for the first railway age was all but over.

The line south of Halwill

The North Cornwall line left Halwill heading westwards, but then immediately curved southwards to follow the valley of the River Carey almost to Launceston, where the river became part of the Tamar. The line dropped continuously along this section, falling 450ft within a few miles.

Most of the stations to Wadebridge, with the exception of Launceston, only served small local villages, with any substantial population

No.31846 runs past a line of cattle vans towards Halwill Junction with the 8.30am Padstow–Waterloo on 22nd August 1964. In front of it are the Bude coaches which will be added by No.80039. (Peter W. Gray)

usually being either distant or non-existent. In the case of Ashwater, the first station, and with the line incidentally still in Devon, the village of the same name was half a mile west and there was little else to hand other than the hamlet of Ashmill. The station was quite remote from any main road, set in a wooded valley, and could only be reached by narrow rural lanes.

The station layout was for a passing loop (every station to Wadebridge had a passing loop, which has made most of them look confusingly similar to historians ever since), with two platforms and a road overbridge at the Halwill end. The loop was lengthened in 1936, doubtless reflecting the longer freights and peak summer passenger trains by then being run with the Maunsell Moguls. The signal box was situated halfway along the down platform, as was a small waiting shelter. Most of the boxes on the line were to the LSWR Type 3 design, with large areas of glazing, but there were numerous variations on this theme.

The yard at Ashwater was extremely basic, with two sidings serving a loading dock and a small goods shed, with a short headshunt, the yard being accessed by reversing from the up platform line. There was the usual general goods traffic, but nothing of particular consequence.

The basic layout at the next station, Tower Hill, several miles to the south and also still in Devon, was to much the same as that at Ashwater, except that the original signal box was this time halfway along the up platform. There was very little habitation in the area around the station, the nearest being the village of St. Giles-on-the-Heath, some way off. Interestingly, the original decision to build a station at Tower Hill had been controversial, with local interests favouring Boldford, nearer to Launceston.

Tower Hill station in 1939. This served a rather scattered local community and was one of the least-used stations on the North Cornwall line. Note that at the time of the photograph there was only one platform line, the loop having been taken out of use just before the Grouping, though it was reinstated during World War II due to D-Day traffic needs. This is one station which has unfortunately not survived until the present day, having been demolished after closure for reasons that are not known. (Stations UK)

The signal box here was closed in June 1920 and replaced with a ground frame, at the end of the up platform, to control access to the yard. The passing loop went out of use at the same time. The two sidings in the yard served a loading dock and a stone goods shed. In 1943–44 the loop and down platform were reinstated, complete with a new Southern Railway concrete passenger shelter. The yard was also provided at this time with two additional sidings, for War Department use, in connection with the build-up to D-Day. To control access to these sidings and increase line capacity, a new lever frame was installed in the station buildings in March 1943. Despite this flurry of wartime activity, both Ashwater and Tower Hill were always amongst the least-used on the line.

Launceston

After leaving Tower Hill and following the Tamar, the North Cornwall line headed westwards, crossed the river (which marks the Devon/Cornwall boundary) and, after passing over the GWR Plymouth–Launceston route almost at right angles on a lattice girder bridge, entered the SR station at Launceston.

On 15th August 1960 the penultimate summer of the 'Greyhounds' in the West, T9 No.30313 eases slowly off Wadebridge shed and glides across the points at the west end of Wadebridge's platforms to reverse into the station and take over a Padstow service from a Western Region locomotive.
(Alan Tyson Collection/Atlantic Publishers)

SR 'Battle of Britain' 4-6-2 No.34079 *141 Squadron* **waits to leave Padstow with a short train of but three vehicles in August 1963. As a farewell is made on the platform, the fireman checks that his locomotive is well coaled for its assignment.** (Historical Model Railway Society/Colour-Rail BRS1432)

Launceston was the only intermediate station of any consequence between Halwill and Wadebridge and its importance was amplified by the existence next door of the Great Western station. The Launceston & South Devon Railway had been promoted by the South Devon Railway and had been incorporated in 1862 as a broad gauge line but with the Board of Trade authorised to order a narrow gauge (ie standard gauge) rail to be laid if so required. The line had arrived at Launceston on 1st July 1865 and was worked by the South Devon Railway until absorbed in 1873. The LSWR's opening of its North Cornwall line service was to rob the GWR route of any Exeter and London traffic, but it remained the route for Tavistock and Plymouth.

The South Devon/GWR route was converted to standard gauge at the end of the broad gauge in 1892 but, astonishingly, remained unconnected at Launceston to the North Cornwall line. The track layouts of the two stations were in fact not linked until September 1943, again in connection with the build-up towards D-Day. It is inexplicable that it took a world war to connect the two premises, although a link — surely the simplest of schemes? — had been contemplated in 1910. Eventually, common sense and economy fully prevailed and on 30th June 1952 the GWR passenger station was closed and the Western Region's services were routed across into the SR platforms. The Launceston–Plymouth passenger service eventually ceased on 31st December 1962 during the severe 1962–63 winter.

The LSWR side at Launceston comprised a passing loop and two rather short platforms, with a more substantial yard than elsewhere, east of the station and accessed by reversing from the down loop. The main station buildings were on the down side and included a canopy, with the platforms connected by a footbridge at their west end. Both platforms had water cranes of the non-swinging LSWR type, with long bags. The station's main drawback was that it was at the bottom of a very steep hill, with most of the town (until 1838 the County Town of Cornwall) near the top, which was surmounted by the ruins of a thirteenth-century castle.

In its final form the signal box, on the up side and adjacent to a small stone waiting shelter, faced both ways on to both the two stations and had two lever frames, one for each company, back-to-back. This probably made it the most unusual box anywhere on the SR system in the West. The box had originally been built as a standard LSWR Type 3 design, with an eighteen-lever frame. However, as a staff economy during the First World War, the GWR's own box was closed from December 1916 and a sixteen-lever frame to control the GWR signals and points was installed in the LSWR box, which then had to be doubled in depth to accommodate it. The signalman — surely a man with divided loyalties — became jointly-funded.

The North Cornwall yard comprised two headshunt sidings and five further sidings, with two serving loading docks and two more serving the goods shed. Business here was substantial and the yard handled considerable quantities of general goods for the town, livestock from local farms and sundries. There was particularly good business in the forwarding of cattle.

In the middle of the goods yard sidings was located a 50ft locomotive shed and turntable, both capable of accommodating a 4-4-0 tender locomotive. As the LSWR worked its Far West operations with cast-off tender locomotives from further east, these turntables were a necessity, with no fewer than six eventually existing at Okehampton, Halwill, Launceston, Delabole, Wadebridge and Padstow. A 48ft turntable had been necessary from the outset because the station had been a terminus from 1886 until 1893 when services were able to be extended to Delabole. At one time the Launceston shed and turntable appear to have been scheduled for relocation to Delabole but that seems never to have been implemented, perhaps because a continued use was foreseen for them, and new infrastructure was provided at Delabole instead.

The other shed facilities included the usual coal stage, water facilities and a small shed office and mess room alongside the shed building. Access to the turntable was only by passing through the shed. The building was decidedly flimsy, being of corrugated iron with a raised ridge section. It gradually fell out of use during the 1940s but the turntable remained in use until about 1963.

The GWR also had its own locomotive shed and turntable, directly opposite the LSWR premises. After 1943 the Southern Railway locomotives seemed to have used the better-built GWR shed but were still, of course, driven and cleaned by SR staff. By the late 1940s the SR's operations only justified two sets of crews and a cleaner. The GWR turntable ceased use by 1961 and the GWR shed closed in December 1962, but lingered on in day-to-day use until September 1964.

West of the station, after passing underneath the A388 road bridge, there was a further siding serving a small gas works of the Launceston Gas Company, together with a private siding for Trood, a local merchant handling coal and building materials. Beyond Launceston the line climbed at 1 in 77 through the valley of the River Kensey.

Egloskerry and Tresmeer

The stations at Egloskerry and Tresmeer were mirror images of each other. At Egloskerry there was the standard two platforms and passing loop. The station buildings here, as at Tresmeer but unlike all the others on the line, were of brick. The signal box was on the up platform and immediately west of the station was a level crossing, with hand-operated gates. The tablet instruments were moved from the box into the ticket office in 1930. The station was very convenient for the nearby village, but its use was still poor.

The goods yard at Egloskerry was on the north side of the station, accessed by reversing from the up loop. This made it inconvenient for down freights which therefore did not call there, with traffic being reversed via Wadebridge and then worked north again or delivered to other more convenient stations. The yard comprised two dock sidings and a short headshunt. The sidings closed earlier than

A general view of Tresmeer in 1963, looking in the up direction towards Launceston, Halwill and Exeter. (Stations UK)

at other stations, on 9th May 1960, and had been lifted by 1961 when the station was still under SR control.

The landscape in this area was, and still is, noticeably much more barren than that east of Launceston, with far fewer trees, as the uplands are exposed to the full force of the Atlantic gales. Farms are protected from the weather by stone walls and ragged lines of hawthorns. The railway here alternated between cuttings and embankments, some very high, and with numerous long curves.

At Tresmeer the station was located in a hamlet called Splatt, a name mercifully not adopted by the LSWR. The station layout was again to the standard format, but this time with the goods yard on the down side, west of the station. The two platforms were linked by a road overbridge and the signal box, with its seventeen-lever frame, was at the west end of the up platform. The yard consisted of the usual two dock sidings, one of which served a small goods shed, and a headshunt. There was a small abattoir serving local farms. Traffic handled in the yard was the usual mix of cattle and pigs, coal and other general goods.

Beyond Tresmeer the line crossed an 86ft-high embankment. A viaduct had been planned, but the local material was unsuitable and there were bedrock problems.

Otterham and Camelford

At Otterham the North Cornwall line had reached a height of 800ft above sea level, almost as high as Meldon Junction. The nearby Davidstowe airfield, two miles south of the station and open from 1942 until 1945, was the highest in Britain. This was an area where the enclosed cabs of 'West Country' Pacifics and Standard 4MT tanks were appreciated in winter and where the open footplates of the T9s

'BB' No.34110 *66 Squadron* **leaves a smoky haze over the platform at Halwill Junction as it runs in with the Padstow coaches of the up 'Atlantic Coast Express' in September 1962.** (Bruce Chapman Collection/Colour-Rail BRS1226)

Otterham was yet another station which followed the semi-standardized pattern on this line, making it difficult for enthusiasts to readily distinguish one from the next. The station is seen here in 1963, looking towards the up direction. It was 800ft above sea level and almost two miles from the settlement it served, making it a bleak place to await a train in winter weather. (Stations UK)

afforded little protection for crews from whatever the weather threw at them, often near-horizontally.

Otterham station, nearly 750ft above sea level, one and a half miles from the village and on the A39 — making it vulnerable to bus competition — was of the usual loop and two platforms, connected again by an overbridge. The main buildings were on the up platform, with a small stone shelter for down passengers. The signal box was at the London end of the up platform. It was one of the most exposed stations on the LSWR, perhaps its equivalent of Dent on the Settle–Carlisle line. The yard here was just a little larger than the basic minimum, with three sidings, two of these serving a dock, and a headshunt. Traffic included cattle, pigs, coal, fertiliser, sand and potatoes.

Beyond Otterham the line reached its summit of 850ft, barely more than two miles from the coast, and passengers could briefly glimpse the Atlantic from the train. This was the mystical coastline which visitors had come to see, of ancient legends and hopefully not-too-ancient hotels and boarding houses. As Tennyson had written (albeit not with promoting long-distance rail traffic in mind):

But after tempest, when the long wave broke
All down the thundering shores of Bude and
Bos,
There came a day as still as heaven, and then
They found a naked child upon the sands
Of dark Tintagil by the Cornish sea;
And that was Arthur; and they fostered him
Till he by miracle was approven King

The above process may seem highly undemocratic today, and might also lack historical fact, but this was the romantic myth which enabled the Southern Railway to market North Cornwall and to play the Great Western at its own game.

The mystique was further reinforced to potential SR holidaymakers by naming the 11.00am down express the 'Atlantic Coast Express' from July 1926 and by conferring the excellent series of Arthurian legend names upon the Maunsell and earlier Urie N15 4-6-0s from 1925 onwards. Thus did the sight of *Sir Dodinas le Savage* or *Excalibur* or *Maid of Astolat*, storming through grubby Clapham Junction or mock-Tudor Raynes Park with green expresses bearing roofboards with 'Atlantic Coast Express' and faraway-sounding words such as 'Padstow', arouse urban yearnings to examine maps and holiday guides and save up for those all-important railway tickets for a week of exploring the magic of Merlin.

The approach to Camelford station was where King Arthur was reputed to have fought his last battle, in the year 542. 'Camelford for Tintagel and Boscastle' was another two-platform passing loop, with the station building

A panoramic view of Camelford station in its setting high on the sweeping landscape of North Cornwall. The station nominally served Boscastle (of more recent flash-flood fame) and Tintagel, two of the local coastline's more romantic destinations. Camelford was another location where waiting for a train in deepest winter might deter the less hardy, but at least it was staffed and had proper passenger facilities. (Stations UK)

complete with canopy located on the up platform, and again in a wild location with rain and mist, or worse, sometimes sweeping between the buildings. The signal box, with seventeen-lever frame, was at the London end of the up platform and there was a small stone shelter on the down side. The station was the railhead for Boscastle and Tintagel which, of course, had to be reached by bus.

The yard here was again a little more than the basic minimum, with two dock sidings, a line running through the goods shed and a headshunt. There was also a small slaughterhouse for despatching fresh meat to Smithfield Market and elsewhere in the days before refrigeration.

From Delabole southwards

The Delabole layout was more elaborate than most of the other stations on the line. There was the standard loop with two platforms and the station buildings were this time on the down side. The signal box was immediately off the up end of the up platform. The goods yard, on the down side, enjoyed two accesses, one enabling trains to run directly into the yard and the other enabling them to reverse in from the down loop.

There were eight sidings, two of which served the loading dock and goods shed. The longest sidings were for the transhipment of slate, with one standard gauge siding laid on either side of a three-track narrow gauge (1ft 11in) terminal, the latter linked to the nearby slate quarry where there was a complex network. For down LSWR trains, the sight of the quarry just preceded entry into the station. Quarry traffic reached entire trainloads in the early years, but gradually went into decline before finally transferring to road. One very interesting traffic in later years was slate dust which was transported by rail to West London and used to make 78rpm records in the days before plastic.

Because Delabole was to act as a temporary terminus, the station yard was also equipped from the outset with an engine shed and turntable. These were located east of the station, in between the goods yard and transhipment sidings. The shed was smaller than that at Launceston and the turntable was 50ft diameter, so could take a 4-4-0 or Mogul. As at Launceston, the turntable was reached by passing through the shed. There were also water facilities.

The corrugated iron shed building was dismantled and sold-off to the local Co-op by 1900, for the very reasonable sum of £20, after the line had been pushed through to Padstow. The turntable was also removed and the shed and turntable area were then redeveloped as further goods sidings.

The precise details of the earliest motive power on the quarry system are not available (can any reader help?), but apparently comprised seven steam locomotives, at least some of Bagnall origin. The system was later modernised with three diesel or petrol-powered units (evidence is conflicting), Nos.1–3, built by Motor Rail of Bedford in the 1920s. By the 1970s one was still active, another out of use and one either scrapped or sold, probably the former.

Port Isaac Road was located, as its name implied, at the intersection of a road rather than at Port Isaac Bay, which lay less than two miles to the west, though the village was nearly twice

A busy scene at Otterham: T9 No.30313 stands at the up platform with the 3.15pm Padstow to Exeter service on 15th August 1960, as unrebuilt 'Battle of Britain' No.34058 *Sir Frederick Pile* **rumbles in with a down train. The T9 was to be withdrawn in July the following year. No.34058 spent the years 1951–63 allocated to Exmouth Junction and was to be rebuilt just a few weeks after this photograph was taken, surviving only until October 1964. By some miracle of fate it is still very much with us, courtesy of Dai Woodham's scrapyard, but has yet to steam in preservation.** (Alan Tyson Collection/Atlantic Publishers)

that distance. The station was very much to the standard layout once again, as was the goods yard at the Wadebridge end, on the up side. The main buildings and signal box, to the usual LSWR Type 3 design, were on the up side and a small stone shelter was located on the down platform. Freight traffic here was moderate, mainly coal and fertiliser, but there were also two private sidings serving Betty and Tom's premises, a stone quarry. The sidings lay on the Delabole side of the station, with access controlled by a ground frame. They closed in 1964.

Beyond Port Isaac Road, half a mile towards St. Kew Highway, was the only tunnel on the entire North Cornwall line, the curving 352yds Trelil Tunnel, passing beneath the hamlet of the same name. The lack of tunnels reflected the line's success in following river valleys, but a price for this had to be paid in terms of indirectness, with the route twisting and turning.

There is a story about Trelil Tunnel. A driver of an LSWR passenger train was dismissed by the fearsome Dugald Drummond because his locomotive slipped in the tunnel, allegedly on fish oil leaking from a preceding train, and bent a rod. The incensed fellow-drivers of the Far West rallied round and formed a protest deputation. When Drummond came to hear of this defiance, the deputation's leader was promptly summoned to London where he probably anticipated some sort of public execution at Waterloo. But Drummond appreciated courage. Peace was restored and the driver whose engine slipped got his job back.

St. Kew Highway was another station that marked the intersection of a road, the A39 trunk road from North Somerset and Barnstaple to Truro. The standard two platforms and loop were again provided, with the same minimalist yard on the up side, at the south end of the station. The access to the yard was remodelled and simplified in July 1939. The signal box was at the Wadebridge end of the up platform, with its back to the yard. Traffic here was even lighter than at Port Isaac Road.

Beyond St. Kew Highway the railway descended the valley of the River Allen, having fallen for a continuous fifteen miles, mostly at a steady 1 in 75, until it reached the River Camel, east of Wadebridge.

Wadebridge and the Camel

When the North Cornwall line originally entered Wadebridge it joined the single line from Bodmin, with a signal box at this location, Wadebridge Junction. However, the box was closed in February 1907 and a second track established into Wadebridge station.

By Wadebridge, trains which had started at Waterloo had covered 254 miles. Wadebridge, of course, had begun life as the western terminus of the Bodmin & Wadebridge Railway. This gave it an extraordinary history which will be considered in more detail in a future article covering the BWR era, the line eastwards to Bodmin (later Bodmin North), the connecting line to Bodmin General and the two branches to Wenford Bridge and Ruthernbridge. In the meantime a basic description of the station must suffice.

Very briefly, the Bodmin & Wadebridge was incorporated in May 1832, a bare seven years after the opening of the Stockton & Darlington and the Canterbury & Whitstable. It opened as far as Dunmere in July 1834 and to Bodmin in September of that year. As we have seen, the LSWR finally connected up with the line in 1895. The LSWR's purchase of the BWR in 1846 had never been sanctioned by Parliament and that was only achieved in 1886. As part of the price for non-opposition over this from the GWR, the latter was allowed to run its trains westwards from Bodmin Road into Wadebridge, via a terminus at Bodmin General.

In the twentieth century the station therefore eventually assumed the form of a reasonably important country junction, with three platform faces. The single line from Wadebridge East Junction was doubled in 1910, so that the two routes into the station from Okehampton and from Bodmin ran as parallel reversible single lines, an unusual arrangement (readers will recall the wintertime arrangement between Ryde St. Johns Road and Smallbrook Junction in this respect, pre-1967).

In addition to the station itself, there was a small goods yard on the down side and additional sidings on the up side, both accessed from the east. There was also a small but important engine shed which serviced locomotives on the North Cornwall line before they returned east to Exeter and their base at Exmouth Junction. The shed was coded 72F under the Southern Region of BR and had a very small allocation of its own including, of course, the famous Beattie well tanks, of which more on a future occasion.

West of Wadebridge, and passing the sidings to the quayside just downstream from the town's famous bridge, the line followed the Camel estuary the entire way to Padstow, hugging the water's edge on a low embankment. This made the route relatively straightforward to construct.

There was a major obstacle near the west end, at Little Petherick Creek. This was spanned, on a curve, with three 150ft girder bridges carried on 8ft diameter piers. The location became one of the most famous in the West and the image of a T9 crossing it with a couple of green SR coaches as it passes Dennis Hill and nears Padstow terminus has become immortal.

In truth, the whole route from Wadebridge was one of the most picturesque on what became the Southern system, the SR equivalent of the Great Western line through Dawlish but much more unspoilt, with the azure-blue water of the Camel estuary and the silvery-gold sands across the water. A trip along this route on a hot summer afternoon, with a travel-stained Bulleid Pacific and the last remnants of an express which had left urban Waterloo in the middle of the morning, and with a hotel tea awaiting and a fortnight's holiday ahead, was an unforgettable experience.

Padstow station

Padstow was to become the very furthest outpost of the old London & South Western Railway empire, with its buffer stops being just under 260 miles from Waterloo's, about the same distance as London to Newcastle but an infinitely more challenging route. This 'beyond-the-sunset' role has always given Padstow a very special place in the affections of Southern enthusiasts.

The port had originally been known for its fishing industry, but became popular as a resort during the nineteenth century. Even so, its population at the time of the railway's arrival was still only 1,500. The town has also long been famous for its hobby-horse tradition on 1st May, described at the start of the twentieth century as "rude merry-making". However, the LSWR's entry to the town did not prompt an inrush of large numbers of holidaymakers as the second class fares, even at the start of the century, were £2 6s 8d (£2.33p), a prohibitive sum for most, with a first class ticket being £3 14s 6d. (£3.73p). A third class return was £2 2s 7d and there was also a special rate long-weekend return, travelling out on Friday or Saturday and returning up until Tuesday, at £1 6s 9d third class which might have been tempting for a few. A hotel, the South Western Hotel, later renamed the Metropole, opened adjacent to the station in 1900.

The passenger terminus was very simple, comprising a single platform and run-round loop plus a carriage siding, and was built on the site of a former boatyard. The station building, again of stone, included a canopy and the stone-built eighteen-lever signal box was of the LSWR Type 4 design, unlike the boxes along the North Cornwall line. On the south side of the passenger station was an extremely small goods yard, with a loading dock, goods shed and headshunt.

The most important part of the station layout was the sidings serving the fish quay and fish shed, where the baskets were piled and the fish sold. The fish sidings reached as far west as the Custom House, by the old walled harbour, with one siding running out on to the mole of the harbour.

Initially, the fish station was served by just two long sidings, including a scissors crossover. The main fish quay was built by the Harbour Commissioners under powers obtained in 1910. The LSWR subscribed £30,000 to the bonds which were issued to raise the capital and also provided other assistance. In 1912 the LSWR Chairman, Sir Charles Scotter, and the new General Manager, Herbert Walker, visited Padstow and authorised a further extension of the dock wall (which reached nearly 800ft in length), the fish shed and the sidings serving it. Gradually, the LSWR took over more and more of the port's running. At busy times for passenger traffic, these fish sidings were also used for berthing coaching stock.

The fishing traffic wasn't the only freight business to be had at Padstow and the small goods yard on the down side dealt with large numbers of parcels and consignments of general merchandise or mineral traffic to and from the area. Other mineral traffic handled on the quayside lines included china clay for shipping by coaster, but this traffic died away between the wars.

In 1933, due to the effects of adverse weather upon moored fishing boats, a new pier, the 450ft South Jetty, was constructed to provide additional moorings and further sidings were built out onto this quay. The earlier quayside was also extended to create a more enclosed harbour. The harbour still belonged to the Padstow Harbour Commissioners but the Southern Railway was responsible for the design and for supervision of construction of the South Jetty.

There was no locomotive shed at Padstow, but the LSWR built a locomotive siding and water tower and installed a 50ft turntable, capable of handling a 4-4-0. The SR moved this turntable slightly south east when the fish dock was being expanded, in 1933. After the war the SR constructed a new 65ft turntable close to the water's edge, at the station throat, just large enough for a Light Pacific.

(to be continued)

St. Kew Highway, looking in the up direction, in 1939. This was another romantically-named wayside stop en route to the Far West and was reasonably located for the local community. Today it is a private residence. (Stations UK)