This paper is not based on original research, but adapted from a talk given in Lyme Regis Guildhall on 1st January 2009 prepared from existing books and articles about the railway, to which is added my own personal critique of the line and the system which enabled such an inadequate line to be built and closed after just 62 years of life. The Museum could do with more resources on the railway and welcomes any photographs, documents, artefacts and memories which you may like to share with us. We cannot collect large items!

Summary
Oh, how Lyme wanted a railway: its first scheme failed as far back as 1845. At least nine schemes and nearly sixty years later the light railway that Lyme eventually got was cheap - and consequently handicapped by difficult access through sidings at Axminster, steep gradients, weight restrictions, sharp curves, a 25mph speed limit and a dodgy 230 yard concrete viaduct 93ft high which had to be shored up and carefully watched.

The line terminated high above Lyme by the then new Victoria Hotel, leaving its passengers a long walk into town – no cliff railway down to the sea, as at Lynton. Run with dedication by local staff, saddled with unsuitable locomotives and second hand coaches it was prey to motor bus competition after only two decades - having itself having seen off one of the last railway-sponsored rural horse bus routes and caused terminal decline of sea cargo across the Cobb.

LSWR Adams Radial Tank no. 488 built in 1885 built by Neilson & Co of Glasgow, now on the Bluebell Railway in Sussex. This was British Railways Lyme Regis Branch engine no. 30583 and is the last remaining Radial Tank. Here it is seen in LSWR Adams pea green livery. It is currently out of service. Image courtesy Michael Stride © 2014

The visitor might have started, with a great sense of anticipation, from London’s Waterloo station. Let’s paint the scene. Lyme Regis – Through Carriage it would have said on an enamel plate on the main line platform indicator. This machine was worked by a rather grumpy man
with a huge moustache who inserted a giant punched card for the particular train and pulled a lever – and then who poked back any spurious name that had appeared with a long stick, accompanied by loud tuttings.

Lyme trains and connections, as Axminster trains generally do now, would have left from the middle of the station, platforms 11-12. Any through coaches for Lyme would be towards the middle or rear, with Waterloo - Lyme Regis boards clipped above the windows or at the end of the guard’s van.

On the front of the engine would be two white discs or lamps, one under the chimney and the other centrally placed on the buffer beam. This means “West of England Main Line, please” and confirms to signalmen which train this is and where it wants to go. A headboard would also be attached, if the train had a name. The famous trains on the line were the Devon Belle and the Atlantic Coast Express, but normally neither had portions for Lyme, so our Lyme train would usually have been anonymous, probably to the chagrin of Lyme’s tourism promoters.

Luggage and parcels loaded, ticket barrier closed, the guard’s whistle hustles us to board, the signal box is belled that we are ready to leave by the person in charge of the platform and if the route can be “set up”, i.e. it is clear, the bobby (signalman) changed the red signal light at the country end of the platform to green or double yellow. Single yellow means enter the section, but expect to stop at the next signal, double yellow is stop at the signal after next. Single yellow means it is hardly worth starting, but start the train must – its dejected driver moving it slowly to the next signal, although no movement must be made until the guard shows a green flag. The letters ML (points set for the Down Main Line) are lit next to the signal light. Nearer the back, above the platform the word OFF lights up on a small indicator, this is for platform staff and the guard to see, showing that the signal has cleared (look for the similar indicators at Axminster). It is not an instruction to go, but shorthand for “the boards are off at the end of the platform”, that is, the signal is clear. This strange expression comes from when the signal was a board rotated by a policeman on a post, “ON” being when the board faced the driver meaning stop, “OFF” when he could only see its edge, meaning go.

All aboard, the guard checks that the indicator is still showing OFF and gives the starting signal to the driver by waving his green flag. The driver probably cannot see the green flag directly, because of the curve of the platform, unless it is reflected by carriage windows. The driver cannot go until he sees this green flag or an indication of it, relayed by the person in charge of the platform half way down, looking back to the guard, turning around and holding his or her right arm high above their head. Nowadays a black and white baton is used, strangely just like an old German railway signal arm.

The driver checks that the signal at the platform end is still clear. It could have changed back to danger if a problem emerged or the signal box decided that it was all taking too long and another train was more ready to leave. With a tug or two on the regulator, the train pulls out, slowly at first, in a cacophony of noise and jets of steam from the cylinder drain cock, to clear any water. The driver has to prevent wheel slip by closing and opening the regulator and using the steam sanders, whilst looking back to make sure all is well, that no part of the train is left behind, that the guard is not left standing on the platform and that no-one, except the guard is trying to jump on. If a problem emerges on the platform, the guard can open his brake valve and bring the whole train to a shuddering stop, so the driver also has to also watch the brake vacuum gauge for a sudden rise in pressure.

Meanwhile the fireman is checking his fire and the boiler pressure, ready to put coal on as soon as there is no danger of a slip ripping a hole in his carefully built-up fire bed. The tank engine which brought in the empty coaches would be shoving hard from the rear, not coupled to the train and probably making most of the effort, to avoid a slip at the front on the greasy rails on the switches and crossings (points to the layman) in the station throat ahead.
The tank engine would drop back before the end of the platform, leaving the express to be out-accelerated by any departing suburban electric train - such was the relatively poor acceleration of a big express locomotive and the immense power of an electric train. The signal would turn red automatically once our train was under way, just in case the tank engine’s driver thought he could make a quick get away. What a grandstand view I would get from my local to Isleworth departing at the same time as an express struggled to get going. Only by the time the electric was slowing for the first stop at Vauxhall would the express get into its stride and sweep past in a rush of steam and shiny green coaches.

Once clear of Clapham Junction fast progress would be made down the main line, with speeds in the high eighties. The gleaming green engine on the express from Waterloo might even be the streamlined “West Country Class” Pacific 4-6-2 34009 named “Lyme Regis” - bearing our familiar Lyme Regis Borough crest of a lion over waves below the nameplate. British Rail presented the plate to the Museum, but scrapped the engine. Axminster Guildhall has the full set from sister locomotive “Axminster”, where both were named.

After a brief call at Salisbury - for water and un-hooking from the rear any coaches for the following stopper to Exeter and the restaurant car - and after the tail lamp has been placed on what is now the last coach (showing that the train is complete) - we are away again. Passing Wilton, Tisbury, Gillingham (Dorset, not the Medway one, made very clear on the station sign), Yeovil Junction and Crewkerne, the countryside is green and grassy all the year round, and cows are contentedly grazing in summer, instead of the arable prairie fast taking over the landscape east of Salisbury. Tall elms would then have graced this western countryside, foxes and deer might even be spotted by day and we would be getting the feeling of having arrived somewhere altogether different and special.

All too soon we would be at Axminster, the undulating Southern main line being ideally laid out for fast running, using the speed gained downhill to charge up the following bank. The highest speed ever seen on the line – in the last days of steam - was 104mph - into the dip through Axminster station, but our driver would have shut off steam well before Weycroft Mill, coasting downhill for a while before braking to a stop in the station.

Station business complete, and only after the front part of the train bound for Seaton, Exeter, Plymouth or Ilfracombe had drawn away, could the Lyme Billy collect the through coaches left standing on the down line in the now unused part of the platform, behind what is now Axminster Power Tools. A complicated manœuvre would see the through coach, usually just the one, but sometimes five, shunted across to the bay platform, adding it to the Lyme branch coach already standing there. Generally, through coaches only ran on Saturdays in the summer, so otherwise Lyme passengers would have to make their own way over the footbridge to the exposed Lyme bay platform.

The Journey on the Lyme Branch
By Steam Train the six miles and three quarter miles from Axminster to Lyme. The Lyme Billy! What an evocative thought!

Shortly after the long express of matching green coaches had receded into the distance our little Victorian engine, well polished, hauling its single, old, but comfy green-painted, rather rusty, steam-heated brake coach, and any through coaches, would shuffle out of the bay platform. One single white disc or lamp would be shown on the engine, centrally placed on the
buffer beam, meaning “Lyme Regis Branch please”. Not that there was anywhere else we could go now. Near the disc was usually a can of steam cylinder oil, warming by the smokebox to soften it.

Two of these engines would be needed if the branch train was more than three coaches altogether, an extra Adams Tank engine having come out especially from Exeter for the task. This would be exchanged at the end of Saturday for the one that had been shedded at Lyme Regis all week, no doubt looking forward to a good boiler wash-out and a well-deserved rest shunting the sidings at Exmouth Junction.

Soon our train would be climbing with a gentle, but firm exhaust to get over first the main line and then the Musbury road at Abbey Gate, near the modern carpet showroom over a bridge, now completely vanished. Then climbing harder on the 1:40 ruling gradient, squealing around the sharp curves in Trill Woods amidst the bluebells (not for nothing was this also called the Bluebell Line), then by Hartgrove Farm to breast the windy top at Combyrne Station, the only stop, 470ft above sea level.

If the rails were wet, slipping might bring the train to a stand on the curves before the top, despite the driver's best efforts – the boiler pressure might be well down because of the climb, the load or the quality of the coal. Low steam pressure reduces the working of the brake ejectors, making things worse by reducing the vacuum in the brake system, allowing the carriage brakes to drag on. Nothing for it now but to stop, boil up more water and wait for the brake vacuum to decrease and boiler pressure to increase. The passengers can admire the bluebells, hear the bird song and generally wonder at the view. The fireman might take a stroll forward with the sand bucket, to drop fresh sand on the rails ahead, leaving the driver to feed the fire. Try again – and with luck creep forward on the sand carpet, gradually building speed until we breast the summit and reach Combyrne.

There may have been a passenger or two, or maybe a family or a churn of water for the camping coach to drop off. If it was the start of term at Allhallows School that would be different: boys and luggage trunks would be unloaded taking much more than the time allowed for the stop.

A wave of the guard’s flag and we’d be away again, the exhaust echoing in the cutting leading to the Trinity Hill bridge, but soon the steam regulator be shut again, rolling down the Shapwick valley and now, generally, floating across the uneven Cannington Viaduct, faster again until slowing to squeal around the curves above Uplyme, whistling for the footpath crossing by Hook Farm camping site, rattling over the bridge over Whalley Lane and then under the main road by the Black Dog. Let’s hope the brakes hold - the descent continues right into Lyme’s wooden station - we don’t want to end up in the saloon bar of the Victoria Hotel across the road, not that that ever happened!

I wish I had travelled by steam train to Lyme: at least I managed it by diesel railcar in 1964, the year before the line closed. What a shame that the line was torn up in haste before it could be preserved: how useful it would be now as a tourist attraction or even as a park-and-ride for Lyme, providing Axminster would accept Lyme’s parking problem! Or, if not a railway, then a first-class walking and cycling route to Axminster.

**What was it like before the Lyme Railway?**

Genteel visitors got to Lyme in the railway age, but before the line was built they travelled to Axminster by train, then inside on the Railway Horse Bus (or “conveyance”) from Axminster, put on by the Lion Royal Hotel and the LSWR from the 1870s. The fare was of 2/- inside, just 1/- outside for those prepared to brave the weather. Before the railway to Axminster was built, it was possible, in 1842 using the connection of the Bristol & Exeter Railway to the GWR to reach London by 5pm, by taking the 7am coach to Taunton and catching the 11am train from there. In reverse, an 8am departure from London would get you to Lyme by 6pm (Dorset County Chronicle 18th August 1842).
Lyme Regis station on a quiet day in the 1950s
With a spare coach by the buffers in case of need
Tinted or faded photograph given to Lyme Regis Museum by Gerald Gosling LRM 2013/49


"The Members of the Geologists' Association assembled at Waterloo Station in time for the 2.40 p.m. train on Thursday, and journeying as far as Axminster, arrived at eight o'clock, about an hour after the appointed time. A brake and an omnibus, each with three horses, awaited the party, and as "shades of night were failing fast", an immediate start was made. Proceeding into the little town of Axminster, and beneath an archway through the yard of the George Inn, the vehicles were driven at a rapid rate through the narrow street that leads into the Lyme road. It seemed like a revival of old coaching times, and as the foremost carriage was driven full gallop down the hill, the Director, Dr Horace Woodward, mildly inquired if no brakes were used in these parts. "Yes, surely," answered the driver". "You used no brake coming down that hill" said Woodward. - "That worn't a hill!" was the somewhat gruff reply. Subsequent experience proved that there were many far steeper hills, and especially the final descent to the Three Cups Hotel at Lyme Regis, which the Members reached safely soon after nine o'clock."

Light Railways – what are they?
The line was a Light Railway, a special category that did not need full Parliamentary approval, but could be approved under a ministerial order under the Light Railways Act, 1896. It was cheaper to obtain an Order than an Act, and the line could be built cheaply by a local company formed of such as landowners and business people. Government grant would be available from the Light Railway Commission, designed to aid rural development. Like an Act, an Order gave authority to raise capital by share subscription, to acquire land by compulsory purchase and to operate a railway with public service duties and responsibilities.

Many light railways, like the one to Lynton, were narrow gauge, but Lyme’s was the standard 4ft 8½in of the national network, which aided through passenger and freight traffic. Opened in 1903, it was almost the last standard gauge branch railway to be built in England, like many
light railways it was built in desperation after many failures. The standard feature of light railways is a 25 mph speed limit.

Today most preserved railways are permitted under light railway orders, even though the railway concerned might orginally have been a “full” railway - the 25 mph limit reduces the potential for serious accidents. British Railways only had a dozen or so light railways: most had been so unsuccessfully that they were abandoned even before nationalisation in 1948 (see appendix 2 for another example for comparison.

**Lyme’s Attempts to get on the railway map – a potted history**

- **1835** The Reform Act – Lyme’s rotten Borough, “the greatest sewer in British Politics”, reformed: some semblance of democracy returns to Lyme, with the town regaining control of its Council from the corrupt Fane family. Once an elegant 18th Century resort, Lyme had decayed badly under absentee control of the Council by the Fanes, whose only interest was the Parliamentary seats, but now Lyme could try to prosper again. What did it need? A railway, but it was early days yet.

- **1838** The opening of the Great Western Railway (GWR) – the world’s first high speed, broad gauge (7ft 0¼”) main line – throughout from London to Bristol and later, with the Bristol and Exeter Railway, to Taunton (1842) and Exeter (1844).

- **1845** Lyme’s first two failed railway schemes - The Bristol & English Channel Railway was to link Lyme by rail with a new harbour at Burnham in Somerset - to cut off the voyage around Lands End, the other, the Lyme Regis & Taunton Railway was to link with the broad gauge Bristol and Exeter Railway.

- **1847** The standard gauge London and South Western Railway (LSWR) reaches Dorchester, its intention being to continue west to Exeter via Axminster beaten was off in Parliament by the broad gauge Bristol and Exeter Railway. Until recently Dorchester South Station’s “up” platform pointed our way, not to Weymouth, as evidence of the LSWR’s intention to go west from there.

**BOX 1: Inter-Company Rivalry and how branch lines got built or didn’t in the 19th century**

The GWR and LSWR were the main line companies in the South West, at that time running on different track gauges. They were in deadly competition. With backing from one of them, a branch line scheme might proceed. One company might back a local scheme to block the other company, but they were only really interested in main lines and assured traffic flows. Local companies, if successful in promoting and building their line, might persuade the GWR or LSWR to run or take over their line. There was no national or government transport policy other than to watch private enterprise or local worthies seek Parliamentary approval and raise private capital - and to regulate the market to ensure competition and, increasingly, safety. In effect GWR and LSWR competition continued into British Rail days, with Western interests eventually winning – and singling the LSWR main line and closing all its branches in our area except Exmouth.

**Box 2: The 1840s Railway Mania and the scramble to get on the network**

The lack of a strategic transport policy resulted in the Railway Mania, peaking in 1846 - a mad free-for-all scramble to promote schemes, some of which were quite hare-brained. The market collapsed owing to over speculaton on railway shares and many schemes failed with it, as well as the Lyme Regis cloth industry. But by the 1860s any town that was not on the network would feel itself doomed to decay, since although roads had improved since 1760, when the Axminster-London coach took six days, it still took a whole day by coach to London from Axminster in 1824. Interestingly there were still coaches to Bath, Taunton and Southampton in 1839, after Lyme’s regency hey-day.
- **1857** GWR broad gauge reaches Dorchester and Bridport and, on mixed gauge, extended jointly with the LSWR to Weymouth, the LSWR having to turn sharply south within the length of their Dorchester station, leaving the buildings isolated on a stub.

- **1860** LSWR standard gauge reaches Axminster via Salisbury and Yeovil.

- **1863** LSWR reaches Chard from the south, and Exmouth.

- **1864** Four schemes to serve Lyme Regis in one year, generally attempting to link Bridport, Lyme, Chard Road (later Chard Junction) and Axminster – all failed, because Parliament got confused and because of competitive forces between the main-line companies, who either objected or did not show signs of support. These were the Chard Road & Lyme Regis Harbour Railway, the Lyme Regis & Chard Road Railway, the Lyme Regis Junction Railway and the Bridport, Lyme and Axminster Railway.

- **1865** Two more failures – one proposed a line from Axminster with a linking tramway to the 1855 Cobb Tramway (see Cement Paper), the other attempted to revive the 1847 failed LSWR extension along the south coast from Dorchester. These were Lyme Regis & Axminster Junction Railway and the Bridport, Lyme & South Coast Railway.

- **1866** GWR broad gauge reaches Chard from the north.

- **1868** LSWR reaches Seaton from Seaton Junction on the LSWR main line.

- **1871** Lyme Regis Railway Company gets its Lyme Regis Railway Act, gaining Royal Assent on 14th August 1871.

- **1874** Somewhat delayed, Mrs Skinner, Mayoress of Lyme, cut the first sod in Lyme with great celebration, but despite grudging support from the LSWR (to forestall a GWR incursion from Chard or Bridport), nothing more was done and the powers lapsed in 1876. The Company applied for an extension, but nothing more was heard of their additional Bridport, Lyme Regis and Axminster Railway. In the same year the LSWR reaches Sidmouth.

- **1884** GWR reaches West Bay, but the planned resort fails.

- **1885** LSWR reaches Swanage.

*Routes of the Proposed Bridport, Lyme & Axminster Railway 1864*
• 1897 LSWR reaches Budleigh Salterton.

• 1899 Lyme’s turn – at the last the LSWR blesses a scheme wholeheartedly, rather than merely trying to keep the GWR out and then not decent providing support. At last a link to the Dorset & East Devon coast is planned!

**The Axminster and Lyme Regis Light Railway Company**
The Light Railway Commissioners back the Axminster and Lyme Regis Light Railway Order 1899, with 50% Government grant aid given for rural development - and LSWR financial backing and agreement to work the line.

Support came from the local Directors and landowners, Sir John Talbot of Rhode Hill and Sir Cuthbert Peek of Rousdon, across whose land much of the railway would run. The Rt Hon Sir John Kennaway MP of Escott was the third local director. Even at this late stage, raising the money locally proved difficult, but the LSWR chipped in with a subscription of £24,000 and a requirement that it worked the line for 50% of the gross receipts, with an option to purchase. This brought in three Directors appointed by the LSWR, Col R Williams MP of Bridehead, H Drummond and F J Macaulay of Clapham Common, thus giving the LSWR control. Sir Hugh Drummond later became the LSWR Chairman, but he was not Dugal Drummond, the LSWR’s locomotive engineer, who should have helped find more suitable engines than he eventually did.

Arthur Pain MInstCE was the Civil Engineer, W B Peat & Co was the auditor, Messrs Seebright Green & Co the Solicitors and H G S Williams the Secretary, all of London. The construction contract was given to Messrs Baldry & Yerburch, also of London. There were some objections in Lyme – would Lyme become a brash resort, overrun by day trippers? Before the railway, Lyme had been so difficult to get to that visitors would stay upwards of a week.

In 1901, although the Lyme Regis Coal Borehole failed to find any coal, the Museum was being built and Lyme had new sewer and waterworks under way. In 1903, with great celebrations, Lyme’s line was finally open for business. Railway, Museum and health assured, but no colliery!
The cost of the line
Over budget because of the difficulty of constructing and shoring up Cannington Viaduct, the line had cost £67,000 (£7.35m in 2014 according to the Bank of England’s Inflation Calculator), but it was cheap and cheerful in design. Somewhat more than half the cost of the 2005-7 Lyme Regis Marine Parade sea defence works, a comparable civil engineering project, and much less than the recently completed three mile long crossing loop at Axminster Station. Even the richest country in the world at the time could not afford to build a decent, safe, commodious and easy to operate railway to Lyme – but why? Was it British make do and mend, a failure to import (or even consider) better ideas from abroad or the result of earlier Victorian failure to invest in a national transport policy or state railway? It was left to Lyme people to raise the capital - apart from a grant from Light Railway Commissioners and to gain belated support from the LSWR.

The problems of a cheap line start to appear
Lyme got a line with an overall speed limit of 25mph, 10mph in places, with curves that could only take light locomotives of short coupled wheelbase. Cannington Viaduct didn’t help matters – the bank shifted at the Axminster end, trying to push the viaduct over. An emergency brick jack arch was inserted, the movement stopped but it left a permanent 10mph speed limit and the need for a watchman for a few years.

At no time was there an effective motive power policy. No thought had been given to locomotive design at the outset, although the curves and gradient required specialised traction. At the start a locomotive that contractor had borrowed from the LSWR was used, but it was not powerful enough.
The LSWR tried many locos in turn. At the opening ceremony two of the famous little six-coupled Terriers from the company’s eastern rival, the London, Brighton & South Coast Railway were used, but these 0-6-0Ts wrecked the track and twisted their frames. Although they were tiny engines, they had a rigid frame bearing three driving wheels on each side, giving a long coupled wheelbase: not enough flexibility to get around the curves, particularly the worst ones at Trill. Neither were they powerful enough. The LSWR tried its 4-4-2T O2 tanks, using them for several years without full satisfaction.

**The line’s famous old ladies – the three Radial Tank locomotives**

It was not until 1913 that a solution was found, the famous pair of 4-4-2T LSWR Adams Radial Tanks, made redundant elsewhere by suburban electrification schemes. These were very graceful Victorian engines, relatively large compared with what had been used before, but already old fashioned.

Their design stemmed from 1882, so was already 31 years old - thirty years is the average life of a steam locomotive. Their saving grace, apart from looks, was that they had only four coupled wheels rather than the six, giving a shorter rigid wheelbase, a front bogie and a radial axle at the rear to guide the loco around the tight curves. Being quite large, their heavier weight was not excessive, as it was spread over five axles. They also had a sort of anti-roll bar which made them steady on uneven track.

These radial axles literally followed the radius of the track’s curves, rather than constant flange to rail contact attempting to straighten the curves or de-rail the engine. The four coupled wheels gave a shorter coupled wheelbase than the 0-6-0Ts. On the other hand being four coupled and having quite large driving wheels meant only sufficient adhesion to haul three bogie coaches each, on a dry day. Their boilers were low pressure and not superheated, so they would have been quite inefficient as energy converters. But they did the job and did it well for 48 years, tackling the through five coach expresses from London in pairs – and adding to the inefficiency by requiring two crews as well as the extra coal that two engines would need just to overcome friction and keep the two boilers up to steam pressure.

When they were wearing out the Southern Railway (SR), which replaced the LSWR at the railway grouping in 1922, could not find any suitable replacements from its own loco stock - all...
the other similar Adams tanks had been scraped bar one, which had been sold off to a private colliery line in East Kent by the LSWR. It was hastily bought back and repaired, allowing the other two old ladies to be repaired in turn. In the end, it became the preserved loco.

**Box 3: Class 0415 4-4-2T Radial Tanks**

| Introduced 1882 by William Adams, Loco Superintendent, LSWR |
| BR Power Class 1P (i.e., very light passenger) |
| Weight: 55 tons 2 cwt (56.3 tonnes) in working order |
| Length 36ft 5½in (11.11m) |
| Driving Wheel Diameter: 5ft 7” (1.702m) (i.e., it could go quite fast – 60 mph) |
| Boiler Pressure: 160lb/sq in (11.03 bar), not superheated (i.e., low steam temperature) |
| Valve Gear: Stephenson Slide Valves |
| Cylinders: 2 outside, each 17½” x 24” (440 x 610mm) |
| Ttractive Effort: 14,919lb ft. (66.36kN) (a theoretical measure of propulsive force) |
| Coal capacity 1 ton (1.02 tonnes) |
| Water capacity 1,200 gallons (5,500 litres) |

**Replacing the Old Ladies**

Lyme’s three old ladies lasted to become octogenarians, when the problem of replacement loomed again. In 1959 a small ex-GWR 0-4-2T (four coupled) engine had been tried, but the enemy loco was disliked by Lyme Regis locomen for its right-hand drive. It was found to be too rigid for the curves, having the four-coupled wheels mounted on a rigid frame with the third, non-radially mounted carrying axle. Few diesels were readily available at that time, although BR had huge numbers on order. Diesels are usually being mounted on bogies, like carriages, and are therefore capable of going around sharp curves easily.

Remarkably, in 1961, the gap was filled by a six coupled tank from the LMS designed in 1946, this time with single axle trucks fore and aft, making it a 2-6-2T. Despite having a longer coupled wheelbase than the old ladies, these LMS Ivatt locos had flexibility, plenty of power and adhesion. Power was enhanced by higher boiler pressure than the Adams and superheating the steam to a high temperature. They mastered the line – and were the only modern locos the line ever had. They came only after certain track curves and cants were eased; one wonders why this was not done sooner. Even they could be troubled by greasy rails during a Combyne sea-fret, having trouble with just one coach.

**Box 4: Extract from Bluebell Railway News 2009 vol 51 no 4**

**No 488 (BR 30583)**

"Last ran in 1990. As one of the Society’s favourite engines, this one is often being considered for overhaul and return to service, but there are many complications. The boiler barrel needs replacement, a relatively inexpensive and easy task. The driving wheels, of hand-made wrought iron, have often suffered from cracks in the rims, and there is much doubt as to whether they can be considered satisfactory for further use. If it decided that the wheels needs replacement, then to make good use of the investment means using the loco intensively and this may show up faults in the firebox, which have been present since its purchase, but which now need extensive repair. These are the many reasons why it has not been overhauled in recent years”.

Of the old ladies, two were scrapped, but 30583 was bought by the Bluebell Railway used for many more years. Currently it is out of use pending a major overall at Sheffield Park in Sussex, but it is kept beautifully clean under cover and may be visited – see Boxes 3 and 4.

**More operating problems**

Light railway it might have been, but in cost terms, basic it was not. Full signalling, full staffing at Lyme Station, the use of engines not fitted for the more economical push-pull working and, until the Ivatts arrived, two locomotives for trains longer than 3 coaches. The line failed to
serve Uplyme, because of the problem of stopping and re-starting on the gradient, and failed to reach the town centre or seafront.

There was no direct connection with mainline at Axminster except through reversing sidings and a trailing crossover, so through services, other than a single carriage, were tricky to run and required a spare loco to come out from Exeter. At least it was possible to run through trains, although this was not done until the 1930s. Rarely excursion trains ran from Taunton, needing reversing and splitting in the sidings at Chard Junction – and again at Axminster. Even more unusual were special trains from Oldham, at the request of the Boys’ Brigade. No through trains ever ran from Exeter, Bath, Bristol, Bridport, Dorchester, Weymouth, the Midlands or the North – and all but the first required several changes on roundabout routes. People with luggage do not like changing trains.

There must always have been a lack of revenue after the more convenient motor bus creamed off the all-year local traffic from 1923 onwards, when the Axminster-West Bay service started (then route no. 32). The SR, owning the competing bus company, used the bus service to limit the shifts for Lyme Regis crews by placing early and late buses in the railway timetable, instead of trains. Nothing was ever spent on the line to bring it up to date. After the bus came, did the locals ever use the line? – did they really want it? Was the failure to serve the town centre deliberate, or simply because of lack of capital or technological innovation. For the local population, buses simply provided a better service from 1920s onwards. I always came by the Royal Blue coach – one change from Hounslow!

Mr W H Thomas was a coal merchant who lived in Venlake Lane, Uplyme

Of freight, there was no manufacturing here other than cement, until that works closed in 1914. All other goods, mainly coal and sundries were inward. The Gas Works had inward coal and oxide, and outward tar and spent oxide. Coal merchants re-located to the Station Yard from the Cobb, but these flows would only provide a few trucks per day. Flows by passenger train, such as parcels sundries and passengers’ luggage in advance would have been significant, and firms such as Boots the Chemist and F W Woolworth used the railway network as their distribution agent until well beyond the closure of this line.

The Southern Railway takes over
The LSWR was taken over by the Southern Railway in 1922, a Government-inspired amalgamation. The Southern had its eyes on bigger things – principally main line and suburban electrification. Lyme was a backwater. Railway management must always spend its time on the things most likely to make profits, so no development at Lyme. But the Southern was proud to serve, and serve it did through the depression and war.
**British Railways – decline and closure**

Winning the war and losing the peace for the second time in a century really put Britain back: in 1947 the railways were nationalised, but not rationalised until Dr Beeching entered the fray in the 1960s. On nationalisation the line became part of British Railways’ Southern Region, usually abbreviated to BR(S). It many ways that organisation continued the traditions of the Southern Railway Company: even the station colours remained buff, green and white and the coaches soon reverted from British Railways maroon to Southern green.

In 1963 things all changed. Dr Richard Beeching (left), Chairman of the British Railways Board proposed in his infamous report in 1963 (*The reshaping of British Railways*) closure of thousands of miles of loss making main lines and branches. The South West main line west of Salisbury was to be retained, but it was not selected for development and all but one of its branches were to be closed, including Lyme Regis. The lines were transferred to British Railways’ Western Region, BR (W), putting the main line under two managements: one fairly keen on it, the other not. Remote, but benign management at Waterloo was replaced by disinterested and even more remote management at Paddington, which had been the home of the “enemy” GWR and where GWR attitudes and practices were still alive.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Box 5: The decimation of the Southern’s West of England Services – quoted from:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Reshaping of British Railways</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PART I: REPORT</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LONDON: HER MAJESTY’S STATIONERY OFFICE 1963</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PASSENGER SERVICES LINE CLOSURES</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Branch Passenger Services to be withdrawn [from the West of England Main Line Salisbury-Exeter-Barnstable/Okehampton].**

- Barnstable-Ifracombe
- Okehampton-Padstow
- Okehampton-Bude
- Okehampton-Plymouth [closed a few years earlier as far as Bere Alston]
- Barnstaple-Torrington
- Yeovil Junction-Yeovil Town [to reopen to Yeovil Pen Mill in 2015]
- Chard Central-Chard Junction

**Axminster-Lyme Regis**

- Seaton Junction-Seaton
- Sidmouth Junction-Tipton St John’s-Sidmouth
- Tipton St. John’s-Exmouth
- Exeter Central-Exmouth [closure refused]
- Bere Alston-Callington
- Halwill-Torrington
- Bodmin Road/Bodmin North-Wadebridge-Padstow

Western Region moved swiftly: the West of England Main Line was singled, although with some investment on new signalling and fast track layouts at turnouts, steam was replaced diesel, freight was run down. On our line a diesel unit shuttled back and forth eight times a day. Lyme’s line became a basic railway – no signalling, no freight, no sidings and staff only in...
the ticket office. Gradually all the branches closed, one by one, except Exmouth, unlike the ex-GWR branches in Cornwall, several of which are still open.

Closure of the Lyme Branch was formally proposed in 1964, but there was some public objection, just enough to warrant a hearing to consider individual objectors’ hardship, the only ground allowed, which was held in Lyme in November, but to no avail.

With a regular bus service already in place, the only “hardship” allowable under the rules for these hearings would be for users, if any, at Combspyne, who would get no replacement service, or visitors, who anyway would not know to object. Development opportunities, tourist access or such like were not grounds which were allowed to be heard. The fare box revenue collected on the line was the only income counted against the running cost – whereas it was obvious to all that travel agents and the Waterloo Ticket Office sold most of the high value tickets to visitors. BR claimed that visitors would still travel to Lyme by train, changing to the bus at Axminster, but many voted with the cars after closure, deserting rail and its uncertain bus connections. It was even proposed to keep the ticket office open at Lyme for sales, rather than expect Lyme people to re-book at Axminster!

Before the closure was announced, a further economy was made, as there had been a shortage of diesel units and often steam had to be substituted, wasting money. In 1965 Lyme got a dedicated single-car diesel unit, number W55000, known as a “bubble-car”, made redundant after the closure of an even later light railway, the rambling 1925-built Torrington-Halwill line in North Devon. But too late, closure was announced to be on 28th November 1965, a Sunday when there were no trains.

The last train ran on Saturday 27th November 1965. The bubble car could not carry the expected crowds: a three car diesel unit provided the last trips.

**Could it have been better?**

Geography and geology prevented a coastal railway, except at huge tunnelling cost. A long tunnel from Trill, near Axminster, to the site of Uplyme Village Hall could have brought ordinary adhesion trains to a station by the old Gas Works site at Poole’s Court, just off Church Street in Lyme Regis, but at huge cost through difficult ground for tunnelling – the Upper Greensand tends to turn to liquid when dug. Such a line would have given Uplyme a station rather than Combspyne, but Sir Cuthbert Peek (a railway director) wanted a station near his Rousdon Manor, which Combspyne provided even if the community it served was very sparse.

Such a more expensive line would have had fewer and shallower curves and therefore higher weight and speed restrictions allowing larger locomotives. Some of the routes proposed, particularly those that ran down to the Cobb do not look feasible for ordinary adhesion railways.

**Service Standards**

Six daily trains ran each way in 1903, reaching 10 after WWI, but more services on the line might have helped make the journey more attractive for locals once the Southern National motor buses started running from Axminster to West Bay in 1923. Instead, early and late “trains” in the timetable soon became buses, reducing the number of daily services to 8.

At no time did the line have regular interval timings: services had to connect with irregularly timed services on the main line despite the Southern Railway understanding the benefit of regular interval timetabling. Compare this with the present hourly bus service, which connects with hourly main line trains at Axminster, although luck is needed with connections. Current Lyme Regis station site to Axminster Station bus timings are three minutes slower than the diesel railcar. The bus serves the centre of Lyme to the centre of Axminster, but by train it was a walk at each end. But the railway’s service to Lyme was legendary: in the 1963
blizzards the line was kept open by the staff running an engine back and forth all night. A summary of times and fares over the years can be found in Appendix 1.

**Electric traction and Cog Assistance**

Electric traction from the outset would have solved the motive power problems. Even though pioneering low-cost diesel railcars appeared in Ireland in the 1930s, diesel traction did not arrive in Lyme until 1963, two years before closure. Swiss technology available in 1900 could have built a steeply graded railway, electrically powered from the start, which could have served the town centres, running through the streets, as at Chur or Brig. Today in Switzerland it would be unthinkable that a town like Lyme would not be on the railway map, with an hourly or half-hourly regular-interval service and fully integrated connecting buses.

Examples of early best practice abroad include the metre gauge Bernina Line climbing 7,408ft to cross the Alps into Italy on a ruling gradient of 1 in 14 with electric traction but without cog assistance, built in 1908-1920. The Interlaken – Lucerne and Fürka-Oberalp lines and the Rhaetian Railways network all use cogs on steep sections, but can run at fast speed as ordinary adhesion trains on the lesser gradients. They were built to run long distances with steam traction, since electrified. The Jungfraubahn reached 12,000ft using cogs and electric traction; construction started in 1898. Best of all is the amazing standard gauge Flåm Railway in Norway, which climbs out of the head of Sogne Fjord to a height of 2,500ft at 1 in 18 – started in 1923 with steam traction, but without cog assistance.

Even in Britain, the Snaefell Mountain Railway on the Isle of Man climbs 2,036ft in 5 miles at 1:12 using electric traction without cog assistance but with the Fell centre rail system for braking on the descent. It was built in 1895. About the same time the Snowdon Mountain Railway was built using Swiss technology rising 3,200ft on a gradient of 1:5, steam operated using cogs for adhesion.

Would the Southern Railway have ever electrified the branch? Possibly - indeed the SR completed 700 miles of mainly suburban electrification by 1937. But there was a war and no investment while the railways were under state control for its duration. In 1945 state control ended, but, despite a brave face and a lick of paint at Lyme Station, the railways were worn out and had to be either refinanced or nationalised – the latter occurring in 1947. Fuel shortages, labour disputes, Suez etc, Britain was not the rich country she had been and no money was spent on the line and little on its promotion. Had Waterloo had retained control, would it have been different? Just possibly, but maybe that is wishful thinking, because the Beeching Report proposed heavy cutting of this part of the network and many Southern lines were closed as a result of it. But BR(S) did eventually electrify through to Weymouth from London.

**Revival**

Very unlikely – Lyme would benefit from a tourist railway of the preserved type which would provide a very attractive ride and useful connections – but too much has been lost despite ambitious schemes appearing from time to time. Now the route is blocked by housing at Uplyme.

**What’s left on site?**

Much of the route and structures remain including:

- Lyme station site is now occupied by builders’ merchants Travis Perkins and a small industrial estate: only some bits of railway fence remain.
- The Victoria Hotel, the “railway” hotel at Lyme, is still there at the end of the line, but it is no longer a full-service hotel.
- Much of the track bed, bridges and culverts, with much use of chert-faced concrete.
- The innovative concrete and listed Cannington Viaduct (on the abolition of British Railways Board (Residuary) Ltd in 2013 ownership reverted to the Secretary of State for Transport. It is now managed by Highways England Historical Railways Estate based at Hudson House, York YO1 6HP).
• Combpyne Station house and the nearby railway cottages.
• The line’s first curve which took it around from the bay platform on the up side of Axminster Station to cross the main line which was fortified as part of the WWII Axmouth-Taunton Invasion Stop Line

Where can I see the line?
NB: The 1:25,000 Ordnance Survey map is needed to follow these suggestions on the ground.

The station site is not very rewarding for a visit. It is on the right past the mini-roundabout on the Uplyme Road, which crosses over the track bed a bit further on by a concrete bridge, now heavily underpropped. Gore Lane, Uplyme, passes over the railway on a chert-faced concrete arched bridge. It is much more vernacular looking than the Uplyme Road Bridge, which may be a rebuild. Gore Lane Bridge is typical of Arthur Pain’s concrete structures. Near Hook Farm camping site the public footpath from Venlake Lane to Cuckoo Lane crosses the line, and you can see the very sharp curves. The track bed is well maintained, but private. There is another footpath crossing a few yards to the west.

Cannington Viaduct can be seen from the Uplyme to Shapwick lane, which goes under it. A footpath by the side of the viaduct will take you under the famous jack arch. There is no access over the viaduct. The line disappears into a tip on the Axminster side, so the viaduct now appears to go nowhere.

A section of the line can be seen from the lane side above Shapwick Farm, but there is no access. Similarly the Trinity Hill Road crosses the line by a typical, narrow Arthur Pain chert-faced bridge near the railway cottages at Shapwick Cross. There is no access at Combpyne Station, where the station house is lived in.

The best length for walking is around the Trill Curves, where Trill Farm permits public access through a Countryside Stewardship agreement with DEFRA. This is not a permanent arrangement and can be withdrawn without public notice, but it can be reached from the Trinity Hill Forestry Commission car park (note, not the East Devon DC’s Trinity Hill Nature Reserve Car Park). The path starts at the field gate opposite the FC car park and a small aluminium framed map board at the stile will guide you past the Trinity Beacon site and over the brow of the hill down to line about a mile away. Cross the line by another of Pain’s bridges and dog-leg down to the track bed by the remains of a platelayer’s shelter – just the brick chimney and hearth with kettle remain. Follow the track around the curves by turning left. After half a mile you can return via Trill Farm or take the public path to Axminster Abbey Gate, which is near the Axminster Carpets Factory Shop. It would also be possible to start from there.

What’s in the Museum?
Mementos of the opening and closing, several last day tickets, a bill from W H Smith’s bookstall on the station, souvenirs of the opening, a copy of the Light Railway Order and Amendment Order, a carriage map poster, a large BR(S) green enamel sign from Lyme Regis signal box, the Lyme Regis locomotive nameplate (from a main line engine, so not really a relict of the line, but donated by British Rail to the Town Council) and models of the station building, signal box, goods shed and of a coal truck marked “W H Thomas & Sons, Coal Merchants, Axminster and Lyme Regis”.

What left elsewhere?
The complete Lyme Regis station building was moved to the Mid Hants Railway at Alresford and in use as a buffet, being originally kit-built from wooden parts. It has not been reassembled as a replica, so doors, windows are internals are in different positions, but it gives a good impression of what the original was like and it is painted in the correct Southern Region colours of cream, bright chrome green and white. One of the three old ladies, an Adams radial tank locomotive that worked on the line, is now on the Bluebell Railway at Sheffield Park (BR No. 30583), and the single-car diesel unit that worked the line after
dieselisation (W55000) is on the South Devon Railway at Buckfastleigh. One of the Terrier locomotives the line started operating with is on the Isle of Wight Steam Railway (BR No. 32646), as is one of the LSWR 02s. Otherwise, there are many examples of locomotives, trucks and carriages similar to those that worked the line, but not the actual ones. The 1903 timetable is displayed in the Talbot Arms at Uplyme.

![Image of tickets](image)

**Some of the last tickets**

Some tickets from the opening are on display in the Museum

**What do we need to do?**

Seek relics from the line, tangible and intangible, before it is too late, including more structured interviews with staff and users and original photographs of the line, to add to the Museum’s meagre collection of Lyme Railway material – but the Museum cannot collect large objects and must leave that to others. Defend the route – for maybe, when the oil runs out, something modern and electric could return one day?

**Subjects for further research**

- Why did the previous schemes fail?
- Why Lyme was left with a cheap and cheerful railway, served by second hand and technologically primitive equipment?
- Did the locals ever really value their railway after the motor bus arrived?
- What happened at the closure hearing?
- Could modernisation and promotion have saved the line, and made it a Really Useful Railway?

**References and Further Information**

Many booklets have been written, but there is a lot of plagiarism between them suggesting that mistakes may have been repeated and become “facts” – and are probably repeated here to. The best book by far is given below and the DVD is highly recommended. The DVD has good movie footage of steam and diesel, the views from the line and interviews with staff and passengers. A DVD in the Railway Roundabout series is available with BBC-quality colour footage.

Branch Line Video DVD *The Lyme Regis Branch* - £18.95.
British Railways Board 1963 *The Re-shaping of British Railways (The Beeching Report)* HMSO London
Maggs, C & Paye, P 1979 *The Sidmouth, Seaton & Lyme Regis Branches* Oakwood Press (since revised)
Acknowledgements
Help has been received in the preparation of this paper from Terry Guppy, who was fireman on the line, Helen Case, Graham Davies and Michael Stride for photographs, Dave Cox who showed me the workings of the radial truck on his large-scale live steam models of Adams Tank Locos and Tony Drake at the Bluebell Railway who provided photographs of the radial truck from a LBSCR E4 locomotive.

Lyme Regis Station – then and now

Lyme Regis station just after opening in 1903
Thanks to Helen Case for this picture

Lyme Regis Station as rebuilt at Alresford, Hampshire – rear as above
Thanks to Graham Davies for this and the next picture
Appendix 1
Lyme Regis Branch - Times & Fares

### Branch Timings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>On opening, steam</td>
<td>25 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most of the life of the line, steam</td>
<td>21 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diesel railcar, just before closure</td>
<td>18 minutes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Fastest Axminster – London Timings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1903</td>
<td>4hr 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1905</td>
<td>3hr 53 (fastest of six daily trains)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1939</td>
<td>3hr 32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1959</td>
<td>3hr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1964</td>
<td>2hr 31 (fastest, calling only at Salisbury)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>2hr 43 (fastest of 11 similar stoppers)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

End of steam on SR 9th July 1967

### Fastest London – Lyme Regis Timings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1903 Pre Branch train + horse bus</td>
<td>5hr 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1903 Branch Open change at AXM</td>
<td>4hr 35 (LSWR claimed less in ads)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1959 Summer Sat Through Train</td>
<td>3hr 26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008 Train + bus + luck</td>
<td>3hr 11 (or 4hr 11 if you miss the bus)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Fares from London Waterloo to Lyme Regis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Fare</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1905</td>
<td>2nd class Ordinary return</td>
<td>£1.35 (=£100.74 at 2008 prices)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Standard Class Anyday Return</td>
<td>£97.00 + bus fare</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 2
For comparison - the Frazerburgh & St Combs Light Railway

This line had many parallels with the Axminster & Lyme Regis Light Railway, run by a main line company, in this case the Great North of Scotland Railway, subsequently the London & North Eastern Railway and BR. It spanned the same years as Lyme, 1903 to 1965. This very cheaply constructed light railway ran 5 miles across low lying farmland and links dunes from a Y junction facing Frazerburgh. Unlike Lyme, this was a branch springing from a branch, the 40 mile long Aberdeen and Frazerburgh branch. The junction was half a mile south of the fishing town of Frazerburgh, on the north coast of Banffshire. The line ran to the seaside fishing village of St Combs. The only engineering feature was bridge over the Philorth River, otherwise cuttings and embankments were very shallow.

It was closed not for lack of traffic, as the line had eleven trains each way per day by a two-car diesel unit, some of which ran full and standing, but because the main branch from which it sprang was to be closed and therefore BR wanted rid what of what would otherwise become an isolated line. That suggests strongly that lines on the closure list stood little chance of remaining open even if they were well used, unless a very strenuous campaign for their retention was mounted. Experience showed that a successful campaign would have to fully involve the local community, local authorities and the local MP and it would have to prove hardship which could not be met by new bus services. Experience also showed that a few marginal constituencies along the route would be an asset to any campaign (Abbott & Whitehouse 1990).

The connecting services on the Frazerburgh-Aberdeen branch had never been numerous, 3 or 4 a day, and four at closure, and although there would have been significant fish, coal and general merchandise traffic before that was run down. It must be strange for a branch to have three times the level of service as the main line it served.

The St Combs line was successful because there was no equivalent bus service and it captured the school, commuter and shopping traffic, even though only some 500-600 people lived at the village of St Combs. There was one intermediate station, Cairnbulg, and two very basic halts, Kirkton Bridge and Philorth Bridge. The line ran a close parallel with the road, but it was not a roadside line in the Irish sense: it had its own reserved route. No doubt it was easily replaced by a bus service, so hardship was not created by its closure.

As a true light railway, the line was unfenced in part, so the regular Ivatt 2-6-0 loco wore cowcatchers fore and aft, although occasional BR standard 2-6-0 replacements and the 2 car Cravens diesel units did not. Apart from a short time in the 1940s, push-pull was never used, and strangely for a short branch, tender locos were used, although BR had used ex Great Eastern Railway F4 tank locos before that. There was no turntable at St Combs: maybe these full-cab tender locos were cosier for footplate staff when bitter north winds swept off the Moray Firth, straight across the cab in such an open and treeless landscape? The track bed is now a cycleway/pedestrian path.

Reference