

A Railway Recorder in Wessex

By R. A. H. WEIGHT



Photo]

[C. R. L. Coles

Bournemouth to Brighton through train approaching Chichester on May 12, 1951, headed by "West Country" class 4-6-2 locomotive No. 34040, "Crewkerne"

THE West Saxons took no account of the county marches which meander across the map of Southern England today, but their kingdom is understood to have included much of what is now Hampshire, Wiltshire, Dorset, and South Somerset. I am therefore presuming to use the old territorial name of Wessex in a broad sense for this railway story.

Three through steam services which last summer ran daily between Brighton and the West provided most useful connections between many points in the Wessex area. One operated to Bournemouth and back, with one engine, train, and crew. The other two covered longer distances, and provided midday services, which necessitated two sets of coaches, as the trains passed *en route*. The Brighton-Bristol-Cardiff working was formed alternately of Western and Southern stock, while the Brighton-Exeter-Plymouth service was operated by the Southern Region throughout and, alone among the trio, provided restaurant car facilities, all the way in both directions. All traversed the same metals between Brighton and Redbridge, on the

western outskirts of Southampton, by way of Havant and Netley. The Bournemouth train went straight on along the main line *via* Sway. The others proceeded north-westward to Salisbury, whence the Cardiff express passed on to the former G.W.R., while the Plymouth train used the Southern Region West of England main line.

My first journey was in the Brighton-Plymouth train, comfortably installed in one of the latest Southern corridor coaches, which formed part of a seven-coach, 240-ton load behind "U1" class 2-6-0 locomotive No. 31891, in dull black livery. In Sussex, along the coast line from Brighton, we called to take up at Worthing, Barnham, and Chichester. Junctions with the steam-worked Steyning and Horsham line at Shoreham; the Mid-Sussex line from London *via* Horsham and Arundel east of Ford, and then, immediately afterwards, the short sided triangle forming a two-way connection with the Littlehampton branch; the Bognor Regis branch, which diverges just west of the imposing country station at Barnham; and near Chichester, the single-track Midhurst branch through

Lavant, now used only for a small amount of goods traffic, were noted on this section of the journey.

We then entered Hampshire, and soon after joined the Portsmouth main line from Waterloo, as we approached the spacious, modern station of Havant, passing on the through, centre line. At Havant we saw "Terrier" 0-6-0 tank No. 32661, in lined black livery, on the little Hayling Island branch train, and also two of the former L.B.S.C.R. "C3" class 0-6-0s which always have worked on local freight duties in this area. We diverged from the busy Fratton and Portsmouth line at Farlington Junction, and, running along the north side of another short triangle, left the electrified tracks behind. We quickly passed Cosham Junction and joined the former L.S.W.R., with views over Portsmouth Harbour and its neighbouring hills.

The next junction, Fareham, in palmier days was an important local traffic centre. L.S.W.R. features such as Drummond 4-4-0s and "M7" 0-4-4 tanks were much in evidence. One of the latter attached to the rear of our train three more modern corridor coaches, forming the Portsmouth-Plymouth portion, which had been worked out to Fareham separately and had preceded us from Cosham. As we ran in to Fareham Station we joined the little-used, single-track branch from Gosport. This was promoted by the London & Southampton Railway as the first approach to Portsmouth—reached by ferry from Gosport—and started as a branch from what is now Eastleigh. On restarting after taking water, our Mogul had a load of 350 tons gross, and we then branched off westward towards Southampton. The double track continuing on our right, northward, to Eastleigh is, as far as Knowle Junction, a diversion, about two miles long, completed for regular use in 1906. It is an alternative to the original single line which includes a narrow tunnel, and is on boggy soil, but still carries the Meon Valley-Alton branch trains, and also the few Eastleigh services booked to call at Knowle platform. A famous strawberry growing district lies to the west of Fareham; we saw L.M.R. and other vans ready for loading.

The Netley connecting line is rather fascinating, especially on a clear summer day if the tide is high. There are some

stiff gradients and curves. At intervals, between the trees, there are views of Southampton Water and its tributary, the Hamble, with yachts and diverse small craft close in shore. We soon caught a distant glimpse of the great port and town of Southampton, approaching which we gradually curved round, crossed the wide River Itchen, and, after slowly passing the eastern end of the V-shaped platforms at St. Denys, ran on to the main London-Bournemouth route. This has four tracks for the short distance on to Northam Junction, where the Terminus and Old Docks lines diverge straight ahead. Round Northam curve, through a short tunnel, and we drew up in Southampton Central one minute early. The present station has long well-covered platforms and alternative main-line tracks. It was completed in 1935, and replaced the cramped Southampton West Station, with its awkward level crossing.

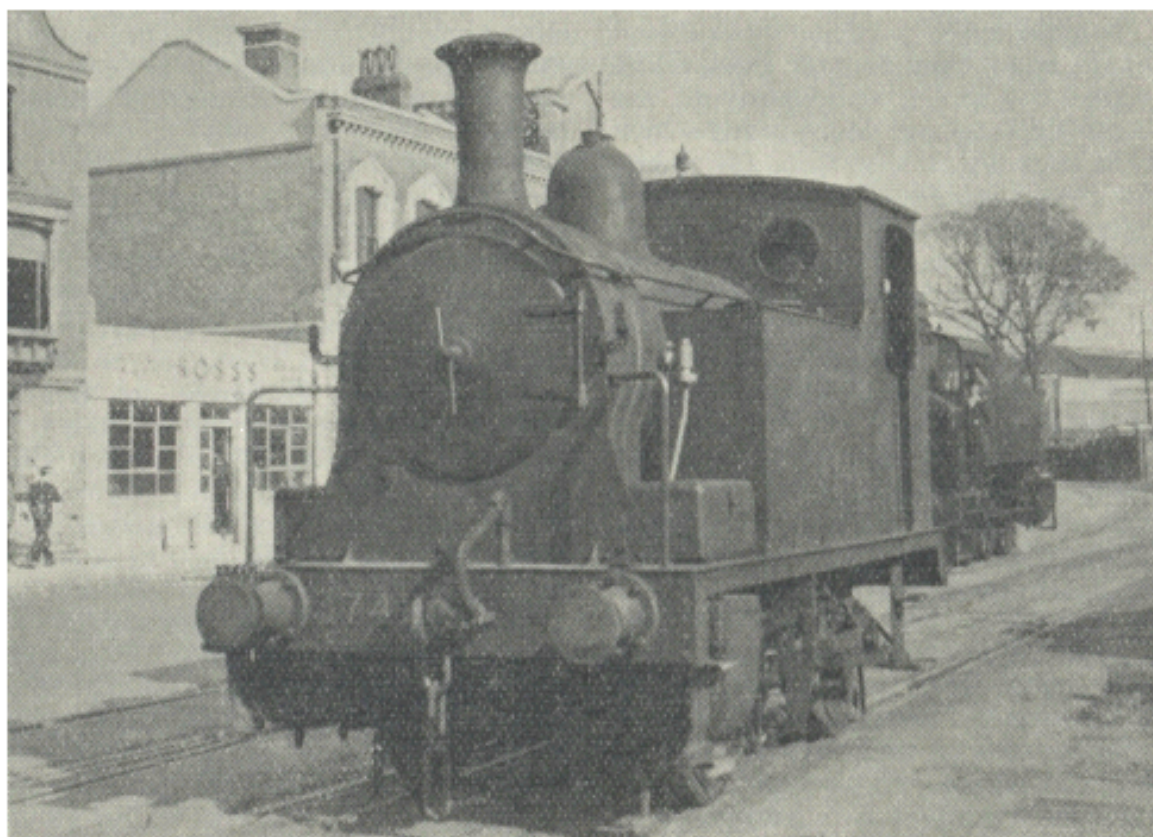
Following us in from Northam Junction came the 4-6-0 *Lord Nelson*, of Eastleigh shed, bound for Bournemouth, having departed from Waterloo at 11.30, as we had done from Brighton. The "West Country" 4-6-2 *Brentor* was also at Southampton Central on a corresponding up express, so three important restaurant car trains were in the station at once. We were off first, passing the New Docks and their approach lines, and noting the modernised four-track layout at Millbrook. At Redbridge there is the large permanent way and materials depot, where a well groomed *ex*-L.S.W.R. 0-4-0 tank engine numbered 77s (formerly 0745) was shunting.

Swinging away from the main Bournemouth route just before it crosses the broad Test estuary, we travelled north-westward over another interesting secondary line, through old-world Romsey, the junction for the line from Eastleigh. Shortly after, at Kimbridge Junction, the Stockbridge and Andover link diverges north-east. This is a country of great open spaces, amid which, in the neighbourhood of Dean, the rather remote looking single line to Fordingbridge and Wimborne strikes off to the south-west. We had entered Wiltshire; Salisbury's massive cathedral spire and surrounding buildings were in sight. We passed the sidings and buildings of Milford Goods Station, where a *Urie* 4-6-0 was ready to

leave with freight, and as we ran on to the West of England main line at Tunnel Junction, noted a disused embankment that could form the course for a spur line enabling through running from the direction of Andover to Romsey.

We arrived punctually at Salisbury, just before 2 p.m. The station has six platforms, including a down bay for departures to the west and bay inset at the London end of No. 4 (down main) platform used for departures in the up direction to the Hampshire coast lines.

from Brighton shortly before my journey, at which time there was a shortage of main-line passenger motive power at that depot. The Moguls are not always equal to the demands for acceleration and steam on the Brighton-Plymouth train. Though burning more coal, the light Pacifics are masters of the job, as the driver had said. Other light Pacifics have since been sent to Brighton, but new London Midland Region type 2-6-4 tank engines could then be seen on these duties east of Salisbury.



Photo]

[R. H. Tunstall

“C14” class 0-4-0 tank locomotive No. 3741 (now 30588) and a “USA” 0-6-0 tank shunting near Town Quay, Southampton

The long-closed G.W.R. station alongside has a decidedly derelict-looking frontage, with eight gargoyles or figureheads still clinging to the portico. There was a “Castle” standing close to two “King Arthurs” at the Southern shed, which, like the station, now serves both Regions.

Our Brighton engine, driver, fireman, and guard left us here to prepare for the return 82½ mile trip in charge of the “Cardiff” later in the afternoon. No. 34037, *Clovelly*, backed on to work through to Plymouth, its home station. Curiously enough, this was one of the “West Country” engines transferred

After 20 years' absence from the Salisbury-Exeter route, I was pleased to find that this famous and difficult main line still presents its strong appeal to the recorder, as well as to the admirer of the lush, wooded scenery. *Clovelly* gave a grand run, and confirmed my impression that the Bulleid light Pacifics seem so often to be more sparkling and impressive in performance when in Western Section men's hands than Eastern. We made the 88-mile run in a few seconds over two hours including four stops: Templecombe, Sherborne, Yeovil Junction, and Axminster, which occupied 8½ min.

standing time. Several of the starts from Salisbury (left 2 min. late) and beyond are hard going uphill. Over 4 min. were gained and an arrival of 1½ min. early was achieved at Exeter. Minimum speeds at summits not in the neighbourhood of stops were: 50 at Semley; 36 at Hewish; and 25 into Honiton Tunnel. Maxima, in some cases attained with remarkable rapidity, were: 77 little more than a mile before Templecombe; 79 beyond Chard Junction; and 81 during a headlong descent from Honiton summit to the outskirts of Exeter, through the lovely Devonshire countryside.

At Templecombe Junction we crossed the single track Somerset & Dorset line and noted the quaint connection to the Southern up bay or loop road which involves backing certain S. & D. trains. One of these was in the station with a very clean L.M.R. Class "2" 4-4-0 at one end and a "3F" 0-6-0 at the other. A Maunsell "S15" 4-6-0 was on a Salisbury train formed of stock in the experimental plum and spilt milk livery. At Yeovil Junction, which is a large station, almost in the country, with island platforms and separate fast tracks through the centre, a Drummond "M7" tank could be seen in the rear of its pull-and-push train winding round from the Town Station, 1½ miles away.

Chard, Seaton, and Sidmouth Junctions are all stations in the country, some distance from their towns, which are served by branch lines that run to bay or loop platforms at the junctions so that trains can arrive or depart without fouling the main lines. Similarly, at Axminster the single line Lyme Regis branch is carried over the main tracks by a flying junction, and is worked by those Victorian relics, the Adams 4-4-2 tanks. The one I saw bore the works plate and date "Neilson & Co., 1885," and had been on the East Kent Railway for about 26 years. "M7" 0-4-4 tanks are otherwise the most common local locomotives, with a few of the smaller "O2" Adams type. Exmouth Junction motive power shed is on the up side of the main line, and is followed by engineering workshops and marshalling yards; the double track Exmouth branch joins the main line on the down side.

Exeter Central Station was almost entirely rebuilt in 1932-3, and is a great improvement on its cramped predecessor,

which was called Queen Street. A striking feature is the 1,200 ft.-long up platform, which has signalled scissors crossings connecting with the up centre line. This facilitates the release of engines, and the amalgamation of Plymouth, Ilfracombe, or other portions of a train into one London express, for example, as this is an important dividing point for such services in both directions. The Brighton-Plymouth train and its up counterpart are the exception, however, as usually the whole rake goes through, often with more than the standard ten-coach formation in summer. I regretted that time did not permit my sampling Pacific performance with a heavy train over the almost mountainous Plymouth road.

Southern trains proceeding west beyond Exeter descend a sharply-curved grade of 1 in 37 to the main Western Region Station of St. Davids, where those going down (from London) travel in the same direction, and partly on the same hard-worked tracks, as up Western Region trains. Similarly, up Southern Region trains come in on the down Western Region line from Cowley Bridge Junction to one of the only two through westbound platforms. Southern Region trains use Nos. 3 and 4 lines on each side of an island platform. St. Davids is a typical older G.W.R. structure, with overall roof and timbering. It is a most interesting observation point, though with its flat junctions and severely limited platform and track accommodation, it presents a difficult operating problem, as it is a key point for so much main-line and cross-country traffic.

While I was there, a Mogul arrived with a slow train from Taunton. At the rear of the train were full milk tanks bound from Wellington, Somerset, to Mottingham, Kent, *via* Exeter and Clapham Junction. While these were being shunted to await transfer to the Southern Region, *Dartmouth Castle* was held up outside the station with the 1.30 p.m. Paddington to Penzance express, which had to follow into No. 1 platform. The 5.30 p.m. Western Region semi-fast train to Plymouth started from No. 5 up platform headed by "West Country" 4-6-2 No. 34034, *Honiton*, which carried an oil headlamp in the standard "B" position (at the foot of the chimney), with no route discs, such as one is accustomed to

seeing on Southern locomotives. These engines are also fitted with electric lamps. They abound in the Exeter district, and among their many duties often work three- or four-coach trains. When used on the lighter trains they tackle without assistance the 1 in 37 rise from St. Davids to Exeter Central. Two former L.B.S.C.R. "E1/R" class 0-6-2 tanks are provided as bankers; one was shunting carriages at St. Davids. A "Grange" came through with a goods, and a "County" 4-6-0 and "22xx" 0-6-0 could be seen waiting in the locomotive yard. Several "Merchant Navies," and also a "King" in blue livery, provided welcome contrast in their clean appearance compared with many of the other locomotives of both regions.

A "West Country," *Eddystone*, working through to London on a "Merchant Navy" turn with a train weighing about 365 tons gross, gave me a spirited run back to Salisbury with the 5.53 p.m. It took 125½ min., including five stops, starting 2 min. late and arriving at Salisbury 1½ min. early. Uphill work was first rate. The Drummond 4-4-0s were for a long while maids-of-all-work in the west. I did not see one west of Salisbury on this trip, though there still are some allocated to the district. They continue to be used extensively on the Hampshire services, however, and the "T9s," the redoubtable "Greyhounds" of old, still accelerate well with substantial trains. We passed some of the larger "L12" and "D15" classes, whose livery is now very different from the trim green of L.S.W.R. days.

Next day, I travelled to Southampton, where U.S.A. shunting tanks carrying

British Railways numbers 30061-74 are now working on the dock lines. These engines have replaced the long-lived ex-L.S.W.R. "B4" class 0-4-0 tanks with their Continental or maritime names. Representing the older types now are some Stroudley 0-6-0 tanks, while a Drummond "C14" 0-4-0 tank might still be pottering about on the Town Quays as of yore. The skill and celerity with which boat trains with their main line engines are operated on dock lines to or from sheds alongside liners are proverbial.

Shortly after my arrival, a special train carrying visitors for a reception on board the Royal Mail Line's flagship *Andes*, at which I was a guest, drew up at Berth No. 30. It was hauled by "West Country" Pacific *Torrington*, and must have made a very fast run from Waterloo to Northam Junction, as it arrived, well before time, in about 93 min. from London. The return special was to be hauled by *Pendragon*, one of the "Urie Arthurs" shedded at Eastleigh Depot, which provides power for a good many boat trains. Appropriately, that morning at Salisbury, before starting off behind "T9" No. 30338, I had watched the Exeter-Waterloo breakfast-car express arrive and depart in charge of the blue 4-6-2 *Royal Mail*, named after the famous shipping company in which I served for a number of years.

I returned to Brighton by the Cardiff service, behind the same Mogul that had hauled me westbound the previous day, then on to Hastings by electric train. I had travelled 418 miles in two days by seven trains, and seen representatives of nearly 50 different locomotive classes.



Photo]

[J. R. M. Parker

Southern Region "King Arthur" and "Remembrance" class 4-6-0 locomotives, Nos. 30752, "Linette," and 32331, "Beattie," at Oxford for through working to the South Coast

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Photo [R. S. Morton]
Exeter train at Axminster Station, headed by "S15" class 4-6-0 locomotive No. 30824



Photo [H. M. Madgwick]
Bournemouth to Portsmouth train passing Cosham Junction, hauled by Drummond "L12" class 4-4-0 locomotive No. 30433