

## Leonard's Bridge station

The following article is a slightly updated version by Philip Brown of an appendix to his revised edition (2022) of *Many & Great Inconveniences: The Level Crossings and Cottage of the Southampton & Dorchester Railway. South Western Circle Monograph No.2.*

The precise location of Leonard's Bridge, sometimes referred to as St. Leonard's Bridge, has given rise to debate and several suggestions. It is mentioned twice in Captain Coddington's 1847 inspection report for the Board of Trade, once in a table showing the distance of each station from Southampton (apparently measured from the Southampton & Dorchester Railway's junction with the LSWR) and again in a table listing the proposed numbers of clerks, police and porters to be employed at each station.

This report was reproduced in the *South Western Circular* Vol. 6 No. 7 (July 1984). Unfortunately, the mileage to Ringwood was mis-transcribed from the handwritten original as 23¼ when it should have been 25¼. The mistake was repeated in Brian Jackson's 2007 book *Castleman's Corkscrew* Vol. 1. The error misled Mick Hutson to state in the *South Western Circular* Vol. 7 No. 2 (April 1986) that Leonard's Bridge was 6½ miles from Ringwood, which would have placed it about half a mile east of Uddens crossing. Strangely, despite this, his conclusion was that it was located where West Moors station was later opened, in 1867.

In response, in the *South Western Circular* Vol. 7 No. 4 (October 1986), Alex Fry wrote that this was incorrect and that Leonard's Bridge was a specific geographical location at the point where the railway crossed the Moors River, about 1¼ miles east of West Moors station. The river, until 1974, marked the boundary between Hampshire and Dorset. A minor lane here ran northwards from Lions Hill Farm, crossed the railway and connected to the Ringwood – Shaftesbury turnpike road.

The mileages quoted by Coddington were Ringwood 25¼, Leonard's Bridge 29¼ and Wimborne 34½, making Leonard's Bridge 4½ miles from Ringwood and 4¾ from Wimborne. This certainly places it near to West Moors station and also close to the half-way point between Ringwood and Wimborne, which would have made sense operationally if one of its purposes was to be a passing place on what was a single-track railway when it first opened.

Comparable figures from the later LSWR Engineers' line diagrams are Ringwood 103m 57ch, West Moors 108m 48ch and Wimborne 113m 19ch. That makes West Moors 4m 71ch from Ringwood and 4m 51ch from Wimborne. Given that we don't know to which points the measurements were taken in each case, and that Coddington's figures were rounded, presumably to the nearest ¼ mile, that seems strong evidence in favour of the West Moors location, and rules out Alex Fry's suggestion of the Lions Hill site. Lions Lane crossing was 3m 31ch from Ringwood. Furthermore, the Ordnance Survey 25-inch plan of 1896 puts the place-name 'St Leonard's Bridge' not where the railway crossed the Moors River but where the Ringwood – Wimborne turnpike road crossed it, about a mile south of the railway.

A further clue is contained in the LSWR's Terrier, or land plan. By West Moors level crossing there is the inscription 'Level crossing & Lodge with siding'. It has to be said, the same inscription is also found some 55 chains further west, at Dolman's Crossing. This latter entry is a complete mystery. Unfortunately, it is not possible to put a date to these inscriptions. The Terrier was a working document, recording land acquisitions and disposals up to and beyond closure of the 'Old Road', but may well date back to the earliest days of the railway. The ornate style of the lettering of these particular inscriptions suggests they could date from when the document was first drawn up.

Newspaper reports of an accident at Leonard's Bridge in 1848 describe a gate, which had a gatekeeper/pointsman in attendance, and a siding on its east side. The gatekeeper's house was somewhere nearby too, although the reports do not disclose whether this was the railway-built gate lodge No. 19. The description does fit with the West Moors location, however, and the mileage figures mentioned above rule out any of the other manned crossings on this length of line, the nearest being Woolsbridge/Ashley Heath on the Ringwood side and Dolman's Lane in the Wimborne direction.

Another piece of evidence supporting the West Moors location is a newspaper advertisement in the Salisbury and Winchester Journal of 30 Sept 1848 for a sale of timber at Verwood. This says 'Verwood is about 4 miles from Ringwood and 2 from the West Moors, or St. Leonard's Bridge Station of the Southampton & Dorchester Railway, where the luggage train stops'.

Further information appeared in the *South Western Circular* Vol. 7 No. 13 (October 1888) in an article written by Miss N. C. Stewart. Her grandfather was in the horticulture business and by 1865 owned a substantial nursery at Ferndown, a mile or so from the railway at West Moors, with a clientele throughout the length and breadth of the British Isles and extending to the Continent. To service this he sought better transport facilities for both freight and passengers. Surviving correspondence shows that he petitioned local gentlemen and farmers to enlist their support for a station at West Moors that would provide both passenger and goods facilities.

A letter from F. W. Fryer, owner of the West Moors Estate, is of particular interest.

*Worcester, 2<sup>nd</sup> September 1865*

*I have received your letter this afternoon enclosing the memorial to the London & South Western Railway on the subject of them allowing a passenger & goods station at West Moors which I have signed. I am afraid it will not be of much use - for the last 20 years I have been trying to get a station there and I have always failed. I must tell you that when the line got the Bill in 1845 West Moors was marked for a station under the name of Leonards Bridge.*

After the memorial had been considered by the LSWR's directors, W. R. C. Scott of the LSWR's Traffic Manager's office wrote to Mr Stewart as follows:

*Waterloo Bridge Station, 16<sup>th</sup> September 1865*

*I laid your letter of 5<sup>th</sup> inst and the Memorial which accompanied it before the Directors at their meeting and received instructions to inform you that they receive very many complaints from passengers respecting the number of stations and subsequent stoppages of trains on the Southampton & Dorchester line and they are very anxious not to increase the stopping places on that line beyond what the public accommodation really renders necessary. They are not satisfied that a Station beyond the goods siding which now exists, is at present necessary at West Moors but proper enquiries will be made and the whole subject reconsidered as soon as the Salisbury & Dorset Railway line is ready for opening - the junction of which with the Dorchester Line will be at West Moors.*

From these various items of evidence, it seems clear to the author that Leonard's Bridge and West Moors stations were essentially in the same place. The evidence suggests that the facilities at Leonard's Bridge were simply a goods siding and possibly, before the line was doubled in 1857, a passing place, the term 'siding' being ambiguous. It was certainly listed in a LSWR publication of

January 1850, *Regulations & Charges for Goods, Cattle etc*, which quoted the same distances between Leonards Bridge, Ringwood and Wimborne as in the Board of Trade report. Coddington's report suggested that, unlike the other stations on the S&D, it would have a policeman and porter but not a clerk, perhaps confirming that there was no passenger service. Mick Hutson noted in the *South Western Circular* Vol. 11 No. 2 (April 1998) that in December 1857 it was arranged for one goods train each way to stop for passengers – hardly a satisfactory passenger service but possibly intended to enable the families of railway staff to visit Wimborne or Ringwood for shopping etc? The station does not seem to have appeared in any passenger timetable. Scott's letter quoted above states that a siding still existed in 1865 but whether or not it was in use is unclear. Leonard's Bridge does not appear in either the 1860 or 1865 LSWR working timetables, suggesting there was no regular traffic.