

Looking for Wimborne S&D

PART 1: Inception and early development. **Peter Russell** begins a personal odyssey.

In T30, we foreshadowed an occasional series of area-based S&D studies. This first survey links to the S&D mapping article and looks at the Wimborne to Corfe Mullen loop from inception to the present day. Part 1 traces the 1840s proposals through the early development stages, with a route description of the 'peak' system. Part 2 moves through the late 1800s heyday to track the long decline after the opening of the Wimborne cut-off in 1885. Part 3 explores the aftermath of closure and what remains in 2008.

For readers in whose minds the S&D main line ran from Bath Junction to Broadstone Junction, someone talking up the importance of Wimborne to the S&D's history and rebalancing the story towards the S&D's southern origins may sound like heresy. But my thesis is that, without railway developments at Wimborne, the S&D might have turned out very differently. As Lucking stated in his classic 1967 study, *The Railways of Dorset*, when Wimborne was hooked up to the S&D, it became the "most important railway centre in Dorset," albeit for a brief heyday of about 25 years. In its early years, Wimborne Station was a hub on Dorset's only main line, becoming a starting/terminating railhead for services to Poole, Blandford, Salisbury and later the 'new town' of Bournemouth. Wimborne was also one frontier for inter-company rivalries and attempts to breach the L&SWR's south coast monopoly, in particular schemes emanating from the S&D camp (despite the L&SW being one of the S&D partners after 1876). Wimborne might even have fallen into Great Western hands, had its promoter's approaches succeeded.

Backwater frontier

Here is a paradox, then – a rural backwater became a railway frontier all too briefly. For S&D historians and enthusiasts, the Wimborne loop seems the least familiar section. It was



Johnson 0-4-4 tank No.32 and seven-coach set, possibly on the 11.50 a.m. Wimborne to Bath train, pass Wimborne Single Line Signalbox (behind the cab) and the S&D shed (right), circa 1900. This view is looking east from near Bridge 228, with Wimborne Junction off to the left and the LSW Broadstone line beyond the buildings. This shed was the second, the first being behind it. A third shed replaced both in 1909, on the site of the second. Note the check rails on the sharp curve. The purpose of the shed behind the signalbox is unknown. C H Eden; courtesy John Eyers Collection (via South Western Circle)

part of the original Dorset Central Railway branch to Blandford, the DCR becoming the southern partner in the S&D. For simplicity, I shall use the term 'Wimborne loop', reflecting its loss of status after the rise of Broadstone Junction. Downgraded by the 1885/6 opening of the cut-off to Broadstone and mostly closed by 1933, the Wimborne loop needs a keen eye to trace it nowadays. The southern end of the S&D has also been far less popularised by enthusiasts and photographers than the more dramatic Mendip section, while the Wimborne loop has been little studied altogether. I hope to remedy that in part, starting with a round-up of the more readily accessible material.

This is a personal quest – to borrow from Thomas Hardy, a *Return of the Native* to my beloved pastoral and heathland home. I grew up around Wimborne from 1958 and it shaped my railway interests deeply. Poring over my father's 1940s edition of the local

OS 1-inch map in the early 1960s, I saw the legend 'Track of Old Railway' extending westwards from just south of Wimborne, complete with a short, intact spur at the Corfe Mullen end. Thus I discovered the S&D's Wimborne loop, which I first explored in the mid-1960s and have recently found time to research and re-trace; a rewarding but somewhat depressing exercise.

Research method

At this stage, I shall not pretend that I have unearthed much new information, but I believe this may be the first concerted collation of the scattered material and rare photographs, outside of a wider study. I've overlaid my own perspective and I hope my efforts will flush out more information from readers familiar with this lovely corner of Wessex. Time-permitting, this feature will lead to more in-depth research, but for now I have mostly sieved and interpreted the findings of

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others, crediting them in the text and bibliography.

I shall do well for now to assemble an accurate chronological and physical record of the loop, but I see such a crude descriptive approach as ultimately unsatisfying, not yielding the real story or answering the many emerging questions. To understand and explain to others the importance of Wimborne to the S&D and to the development of East Dorset, I shall need to interpret the politics and economics underlying the rise of the local railways, perhaps with some fresh insights. Other researchers have delved into this field, some deeper than most; I shall review their approaches and overlay my own, rather than take existing material as sacrosanct.

Accessible material

An outline of S&D railway development at Wimborne is included in standard S&D and L&SW histories, but the little written in any depth is not that well-known and is spread among several publications. Bill Coomer's self-published 1997 book *History of the Somerset & Dorset Railway; Wimborne Junction to Blandford St Mary* is by far the most detailed, but least familiar to S&D aficionados. Unfortunately, it focuses more on Bailey Gate than the Wimborne or Blandford ends, is not the clearest of reading, and offers few references for its claims. I've used 'facts' from this book

where appropriate, while questioning them if necessary. Brian Jackson's 2007 book on Castleman's Corkscrew (see Reviews) also covers the route in outline, but with little new information.

Lawrence Poplewell is the most thorough railway historian of the Bournemouth-Poole area, citing his sources with exceptional academic rigour, but his works are also self-published and, again, not widely known. J H Lucking's *Railways of Dorset* traces all the early proposals through to the county network eventually constructed, including lines focused on Wimborne – both abortive and successful. Michael Webb's recollections of 1940s and 1950s railway life at Wimborne fill in a lot of the human story. All these works are helpful, but I'm unaware of any study sharply focused on all facets of railway development at Wimborne, or even just on the S&D there. My articles will not exhaust that objective either, but they make a start.

Visual records of the Wimborne loop are scarce. Official photographs may await discovery in railway archives, but few have been published, especially pre-closure or from the heyday. L&SWR photographer, C H Eden, captured several views in the early 1900s, while Bill Coomer unearthed some inter-war gems from local railway families, and post-war photographers such as Colin Caddy, George Marsh, John Eyers,

Colin Divall and myself took a few pictures before the very end. Over three instalments, I shall show a representative selection from these sources and others, including in the next issue and in *T34* colour pictures from the late 1960s up to now. Those in Part 1 inevitably post-date the 1880s heyday.

Potted history

The preceding map shows the entire Wimborne-Broadstone-Corfe Mullen triangle at its 'peak' state, to provide a wider context and clarify the history and route description. So far, it's under-researched, factually incomplete and some way off a finished product, so I'd welcome inputs from readers.

A branch from Wimborne to Blandford was mooted from the Southampton & Dorchester Railway (yes, another S&DR!) when that line was promoted in the mid-1840s, but the Blandford scheme was suspended for lack of Parliamentary time. Even this early, there were visions of a English Channel to Bristol Channel link, which eventually emerged as the S&D's Wimborne to Burnham route. Schemes to link the Midlands and North with south coast ports were also proliferating, notably the South Midlands Union Railway and Manchester & Poole Railway, which surveyed much the same alignment as the S&D's later Bath to Broadstone route. So Wimborne to Blandford was never intended as just a local branch.

The Southampton & Dorchester was authorised in 1845 and a single line opened through Wimborne on June 1st 1847, around the time that the Railway Mania of 1845-46 collapsed, contributing to the Company failing to renew its application for the Blandford branch. A variant re-emerged in the 1850s, authorised as the Dorset Central Railway on July 29th 1856; being anything but 'Central' to Dorset, it hinted at future expansion!

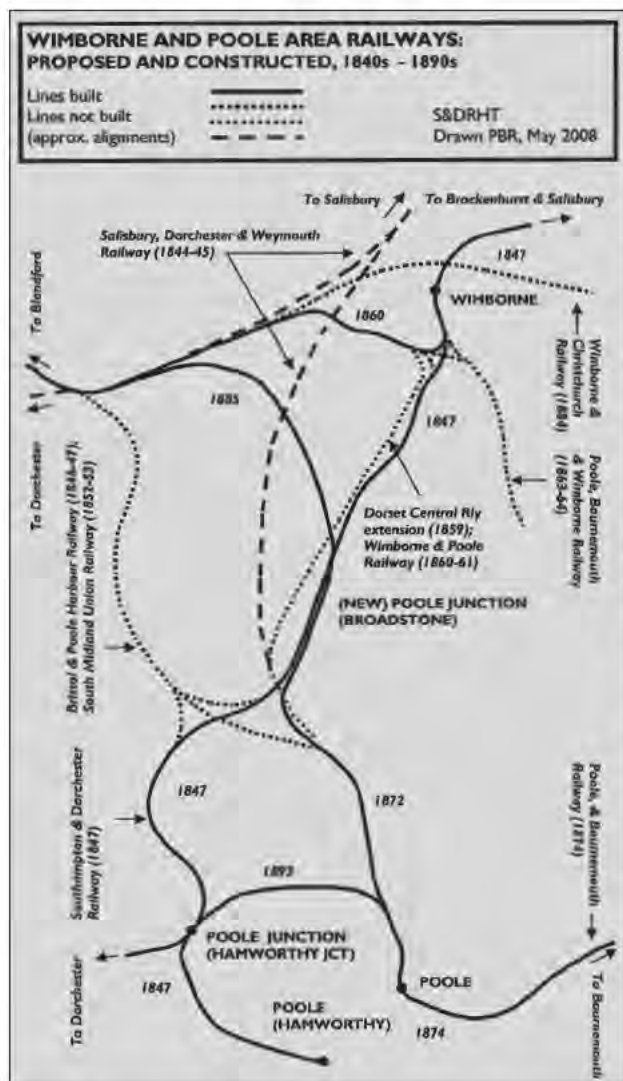
A single line from Wimborne Junction to a temporary station at Blandford St. Mary opened formally on October 31st 1860 and to public traffic the next day. Both the DCR and the Southampton & Dorchester were worked by the L&SW initially. The latter was soon absorbed by the L&SW, but not before its promoter, Wimborne solicitor Charles Castleman, had tried to interest the Great Western in acquisition.

Prior to the DCR opening, the Board of Trade inspector had insisted that a loco shed and turntable should be provided at Wimborne, but, with no corresponding turntable at Blandford, the initial passenger services were worked by tank locos. Within three years of the DCR opening, the Southampton & Dorchester



A Vulcan ('Scottie') 0-6-0 No. 56 and Wimborne-bound train pass under Oakley Road Bridge at MP 63 and over Wimborne Single Line Junction, circa 1900. Note the tall junction signal, to allow good sighting from the S&D signalbox behind the camera. The bridge carried the main Wimborne-Poole road over the S&D and was clearly built for double track. A head-on collision occurred west of the bridge in 1866. Wimborne Bypass now passes through this site to the left, under a modern concrete bridge.

C H Eden; courtesy John Eyers Collection (via South Western Circle)



(1874). With the S&D's Bath extension also complete in 1874, and then the joint L&SW and Midland takeover from 1876, through traffic via Wimborne experienced some rapid growth into the 1880s.

The increasing density of L&SW and S&D services sharing double track between Wimborne and Broadstone, together with the north-facing Wimborne Junction requiring an obligatory and cumbersome reversal of all through S&D trains at Wimborne Station from 1862 onwards, eventually proved unacceptable. This was circumvented by the opening in 1885/86 of the single-track cut-off from Corfe Mullen to Broadstone, taking the principal S&D fast passenger services and much through goods traffic away from Wimborne. Various called the Wimborne cut-off, the Corfe Mullen cut-off, the Broadstone

extension from its authorised Blandford branch, to run from west of Wimborne Junction into central Poole, roughly parallel to the L&SW route to a point south of Broadstone. It was dropped after the L&SW opposed it and promised improvements to facilities at Poole instead, but when these excluded a more direct route and a new central station, the DCR scheme re-emerged in 1860-61 as the independent Wimborne & Poole Railway. This proposed a west-to-south loop from the DCR at Merley to join the L&SW south of Oakley, bypassing Wimborne Junction, but also included a separate line from Merley into Poole. Either would have obviated reversal of S&D trains at Wimborne long before the 1885 cut-off, but they never reached Parliament.

In 1863-64, a Poole, Bournemouth & Wimborne Railway proposal envisaged both north-to-east and west-to-east connections at Wimborne Junction, leading to a route running south-eastwards to near Branksome, where a junction would face Poole, the other line running east into Bournemouth. It sought reciprocal running powers with the L&SW and S&D, but the former declined and objections from Poole Corporation finished the scheme off.

As late as 1884, further railway development at Wimborne was mooted, with the S&D's notorious contractor, Charles Waring, promoting the nominally independent Wimborne & Christchurch Railway. Despite the L&SW and Midland by then running the S&D Joint Committee, Waring and the S&D Board still had visions of regaining corporate independence and striking out to pastures new, as they had done so extravagantly with the Bath extension in 1872-74. Waring was always on the look-out for projects to out-flank the established railway companies and port authorities, albeit to then sell them on to a larger concern for his personal profit. North of Burnham, he had promoted an unsuccessful extension to a proposed international, deep-water port on the Bristol side of Brean Down, trying to break the monopoly of the tide-bound Bristol Docks.

The W&C scheme proposed a 'drop-line' from the S&D west of Lake Crossing, passing north of Wimborne Junction (so escaping the L&SW stranglehold) and down the Lower Stour Valley to Christchurch Harbour. A prospectus envisaged an international port below Hengistbury Head, easily out-competing historic Poole and rivalling even Southampton. The main significance for the S&D was that Waring may have seen the Midland as a potential ally in such an incursion, giving it the

“Visual records of the Wimborne loop are scarce. Official photos may await discovery in archives”

had doubled its line to cope with growing traffic levels, the section south of Wimborne being doubled in 1863. How this affected the original 1860 layout at Wimborne Junction is speculative, but it may have led to the doubling from there to Wimborne Single Line Junction a few chains west.

In 1862, the DCR extended one mile to the central Blandford Station, once the Stour viaduct was complete, then subsequently to Cole (Bruton) to meet the Somerset Central Railway (SCR) extension from Glastonbury, so forming the Somerset & Dorset Railway (S&DR) through route from Wimborne to Burnham-on-Sea. The S&DR had running powers over the L&SWR into Poole, S&D trains working from Wimborne to the original Poole station (later Hamworthy Goods) from 1863 until lines were opened to the new Poole Station (1872) and Bournemouth West

cut-off, or the Broadstone loop, only the first-named accurately describes its purpose. Although the Wimborne loop then had a much-reduced status, local trains – both passenger and goods – continued to pass that way, and Wimborne Station retained much of its exchange role. However, S&D services declined and, following economies in World War I, only one token passenger service each way was using it in the run-up to closure to passengers on July 11th 1920. Through goods services continued until 1933, after which Carter's Siding was served from Corfe Mullen until 1959 and a short siding was retained at Wimborne Junction.

Failed proposals

The limited network actually built near Wimborne conceals a few might-have-beens with S&D connections. In 1859, the DCR first proposed a southern

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longed-for direct access from the north to major South Coast port facilities, which running powers to Bournemouth West could not. However, the powerful L&SW saw off the W&C proposal and Wimborne's railway network grew no more. Had much of this speculation materialised, Wimborne Junction might have been more complex than Templecombe and comparable with places like Filton Junction or Westbury (Wiltshire)!

Bound for Bath

This description of the S&D loop starts from Wimborne Station (63m. 45ch. from Bath Junction). Bath-bound trains proceeded south over the Stour Viaduct to Wimborne Junction (63m. 19 ch.), controlled by the L&SW signalbox. L&SW and S&D maintenance met at S&D mileage 63 m. 17 ch., a boundary sign existing here until the 1960s. From the Junction, the DCR's double line of metals curved sharply west with check rails, dropping away from the L&SW lines at 1 in 191, then merging after 12 chains into one line at Wimborne Single Line (or Wimborne Loop) Junction (63m. 7 ch.), with its own S&D signalbox. From there the line passed under Oakley Road Bridge (No. 228 at 63m.), where formation and bridge were wide enough for two tracks but doubling never occurred. Between the L&SW and S&D lines, the S&D loco depot was established, together with Canford Siding for public goods use (mainly coal). Originally, Wimborne Station was

A grainy but extremely rare picture of Wimborne Junction (LSW) signalbox, looking south towards Broadstone, circa 1913. The S&D veers off right down a 1 in 191 gradient past the loco sheds, the line to Broadstone (left) climbing slightly. This was not the first signalbox here; that dated from the DCR opening in 1860 and was probably replaced as traffic built up. This one is a standard LSW design from the late 1800s. Note the tall, spindly junction signal (centre-picture between the lines). The shed beside the signalbox is probably a lamp room. G A Perkins; courtesy *Railway & Travel Monthly*, March/April 1914 (via Prof. Colin Divall and National Railway Museum).



to be sited near the Junction, but local objections led to it being moved north of the river.

Leaving the long cutting under Bridge 228, the line ran over a low embankment and then flush with surrounding farmland, veering closer to the River Stour and along an embankment past Merley Hall Farm. Bridge 227 (Merley Bridge, at 62m. 18ch.) was an occupation under-bridge connecting farmland on either side.

Passing Lake Farm, the line cut the southern end of the site of Lake Fort – a strategic Roman encampment at the convergence of Roman roads, for many years a nationally-important base during the early stages of the invasion and only

explored by archaeologists in 1967.

'Lake' apparently referred to a point where the Roman road from Hamworthy to Badbury Rings forded a subsidiary loop of the River Stour (possibly even its original alignment). Prior to effective land drainage, this area may have been under water, especially in winter months, further justifying the Lake name. Even in railway days, this lowest lying section of the Wimborne loop was susceptible to flooding. Passing MP 62, the S&D approached the Wimborne Road at Lake Crossing (61m. 51ch), known colloquially as 'Lake Gates'. Prior to the modern A31 – later paralleling the S&D from here to Corfe Mullen church, this was the main road from Wimborne to Dorchester. A tiny crossing keeper's cottage stood on the north side of the line, west of the gates. A small ground frame operated the gates and the signals guarding the approaches on either side.

Further west, the line passed Corfe Mullen Siding (61 m. 17 ch.), known generally as Carter's Clay Siding and opened in 1903 (see Part 2). It continued west over Digger's Bridge (Br. 224, 60 m. 78 ch.), possibly named after clay diggers and known colloquially but inexplicably as 'Marble Arch'. Here the Wimborne cut-off (opened to goods on November 14th 1885 and to passengers on December 14th 1886) appeared high up on the south east side, descending a 1:80 bank, the two single lines gradually converging close to Corfe Mullen Junction Bridge (Br 223, 60 m. 28 ch.).

For 20 years after 1885, no physical junction existed at Corfe Mullen, the two parallel, bi-directional single lines running together to Bailey Gate, where two opposite-hand crossover connections were made. Corfe Mullen Junction was



Another very rare view along the Wimborne loop, circa 1912, albeit with no distinguishing landscape or engineering features. Vulcan 2-4-0 No. 15A and westbound train pass Merley Bridge (227) beside Merley Hall Farm, between Wimborne Junction and Lake Crossing. Note the bridge number plate (foreground). Wimborne Bypass now passes to the right, with a stretch of the S&D embankment still evident on the north side in 2008. Unknown, but probably C H Eden; courtesy Graham Kelsey.

established in 1905, with two crossovers and a new signalbox (opened on April 16th 1905) west of Knoll Lane Crossing, replacing an earlier 'box east of the crossing, facing the keeper's house. By this time, the old route into Wimborne was already on its way to becoming an anachronistic if delightful backwater, so the junction was primarily between the single and double-track sections of the main S&D route, rather than between the Wimborne and Broadstone lines.

Early train services

Detailed description of early train services must await analysis of working timetables. Suffice to say that, from 1860 to 1862, passenger services between Wimborne and Blandford were essentially local (five trains each way per day), and goods services were inhibited by the lack of facilities at the temporary station at Blandford St. Mary. With completion of the through route to Burnham in 1862, through S&D passenger services commenced and ran through to Poole (Hamworthy) until 1872. After the Mendip extension opened in 1874, through running began from Bath and subsequently further north, reversal at Wimborne remaining essential until 1886.

The importance of Wimborne to the S&D for both passenger and goods services thus escalated and the reversal of through passenger trains at the station undoubtedly grew from an irritant to a substantial operational problem. With

This would not have been used for S&D passenger arrivals because there was never any direct access to it from the Up line between the junction and the station; nor was there any equivalent Up bay at the Poole end. How often and for how long, if at all, the Down bay was actually used by local S&D trains is not clear. At 180 feet long, it had capacity for six or seven short carriages, so local services and early through trains from Wimborne to Burnham or Bath would have fitted in the bay, but it's also likely that they used the main through platforms, causing further conflicts with L&SW services. Down through trains off the S&D must have used the main Up platform before reversing. (Part 2 will also deal with the conflicting Up and Down designations of lines, platforms and trains at Wimborne, caused partly by the S&D presence.)

Immediately east of the S&D bay, there was a curious 'back road' using the outer face of the Down platform. One source says this formed an 'island' platform, with trains arriving and departing from both sides; again, there are doubts. It's unlikely that S&D departures for Burnham and Bath used this face, not least because it was not signalled to do so, access being via the goods yard throat. Track plans show that this line always ended in a long dead-end siding north of the station, with no direct feeder point from the Down Main to enable direct through running from the Southampton end; any access at that end would have required a double reversal of



Lake Crossing, circa 1910-20, looking north at the crossing keeper's cottage. The crossing was right of the camera. Note the nameplate, the crossing keeper (or his wife), rustic pergola and apparently a rocking chair beyond the gateway. Virtually nothing remains in 2008 to pinpoint the site, but the A31 roundabout alongside is still called 'Lake Gates'. The mystery picture in Miscellany may have been taken from the upstairs window. Unknown; courtesy Frank Guy, via George Marsh.

“Immediately east of the S&D bay, there was a curious ‘back road’ using the Down platform”

Poole and more crucially Bournemouth becoming far more important destinations, a Wimborne cut-off became inevitable. Once this opened in 1885/86, the S&D's Wimborne loop went into decline, a mere 25 years after opening but no less than 85 years before its last remnant would be removed. While most S&D through services to and from Bournemouth now avoided Wimborne, a handful still went that way.

S&D workings

In the 1860-1885 heyday and even beyond, the layout at Wimborne Junction and Wimborne Station created some odd movements for S&D trains, with repercussions on L&SW services. Local DCR/S&D passenger trains from Wimborne could start from a short Down bay at the station – apparently, but dubiously tagged 'the S&D bay'.

southbound trains. Whatever the truth, early S&D operations at Wimborne may have caused the L&SW considerable headaches and disruption to London-Weymouth services. (I shall look briefly at train controls and signalling in Part 2, but this is another area of obscurity and a research topic in its own right.)

Wimborne S&D shed

To accommodate locos at the Junction from 1860, two sheds were built. The smaller, first one was single-road, timber-built, accessed over a 44 ft. 9 in. turntable and undoubtedly housed the tank loco used on early Blandford trains. The second, two-road, timber-built shed was further west and probably added to meet traffic growth and perhaps offer the L&SW some facilities. In 1909, a new two-road, timber-built shed for five locos replaced both. The turntable later

turned locos off S&D trains terminating or reversing at Wimborne. Part 2 will deal with the depot development in more detail, including the 1902 staff hostel.

With the growth outlined in Part 1, the S&D's presence at Wimborne had peaked. The 1885 opening of the cut-off line was a watershed and the loop gradually declined, taking 85 years before removal of its last vestiges. In Part 2, I shall deal with the heyday, post-1885 rundown and closure stages.

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PART 2: Heyday, Decline & Closure. Peter Russell continues his personal odyssey of this early S&D casualty.

In T32, I outlined early railway schemes around Wimborne leading to the opening of the Dorset Central Railway (DCR) from Wimborne to Blandford and formation of the early S&D. I took the story of the S&D's 'Wimborne Loop' into the heyday of the 1880s before the cut-off to Broadstone opened. In Part 2, I expand on the heyday but also looked at the seeds of decline, early closure proposals, rationalisation and the run-down to final closure. Part 3 will deal with the aftermath and the fortunes of the remaining railway land.

S&D heyday

With the S&D open throughout by 1874 between Bournemouth West and Bath via Wimborne, with London-Weymouth traffic via Wimborne building up briskly, and with local services focused on Wimborne developing, Wimborne Station became a busy hub of East Dorset's railway system into the 1880s.

Wimborne remained a small market town but the railway boosted prosperity. Little detail is known yet about the exchange of S&D traffic here during this hectic time. Using running powers, S&D trains had initially worked through to Poole (Hamworthy) with S&D locos, then progressively with L&SWR locos sent out light engine from Bournemouth to Wimborne or held on Wimborne's S&D shed before coupling up to S&D train stock for the reversed trip to Bournemouth. The reversal procedure was, of course, unnecessary after the 1885 cut-off opened, except for a few through passenger trains still sent over the loop. While the S&D presence at Wimborne Station diminished substantially after that, railway development there in general continued well into the 20th Century, even after the Bournemouth direct line opened (from Brockenhurst in 1888), then Holes Bay curve (1893), reducing Brockenhurst-Wimborne-Hamworthy to secondary status as the 'Old Road'.

Substantial goods exchange and train marshalling continued at the growing

Wimborne yard after 1885, partly due to limited capacity for goods handling in the Bournemouth area, the Old Road offering capacity as an avoiding line for the growing conurbation for east-west goods services. Poole had the only sizeable yard on the direct route throughout the steam age, facilities at Hamworthy Junction, Branksome,

Bournemouth West and East, and Christchurch being quite constrained. In particular, Wimborne and Poole yards may have relieved Bournemouth's goods station on the cramped former Bournemouth East Station site. Much goods traffic had little business in the Bournemouth area anyway, with Weymouth/Dorchester/Poole to



Wimborne S&D Single Line Junction looking east from Oakley Road Bridge, with the third S&D shed, water tower and LSW lines in the background. Dated 1931, the shed had been closed since 1923, yet appears in good working condition. The S&D signalbox, closed 1928, has gone, its site marked by bushes near the water tower. The S&D Up line looks well used. The orchard (right) was at the bottom of the S&D hostel gardens.

Courtesy Eyers Collection/South Western Circle



Roadside elevations of the S&D staff cottages (centre) and hostel (furthest away) at Wimborne Junction, looking east from the Poole Road/Oakley Lane junction, 1957. *John Eyers. Courtesy Eyers collection/South Western Circle*

Southampton/Eastleigh and Nine Elms being the core flow. S&D goods traffic going east of Wimborne, especially milk towards London, would have largely piggy-backed on this flow and Wimborne-Eastleigh goods workings became an important traffic feature right until the 1960s.

Round-the-clock working on the eastern edge of this small town takes some imagining now. It must have been atmospheric – more akin to a metropolitan area than Hardy’s somnolent Dorset. Even in the early 1960s, I recall a school friend’s tale of counting a 115-wagon goods train near Wimborne – perhaps youthful exaggeration, but there was undoubtedly a regular evening Wimborne-Eastleigh goods often numbering around 60 wagons. As a teenager, I would often lie awake at night, listening to the haunting sound of a steam-hauled goods train clattering east over the heathland towards the New Forest.

It’s some measure of Wimborne Station’s importance to local railways that, at its peak, it employed 112 staff, including, those involved in cartage, permanent way, signalling and telegraph, and carriage and wagon departments, each with small premises. I assume these were all L&SWR employees, but much of their time would apply to work originating from the S&D; it seems unlikely that any S&D staff were based there, as opposed to at the Junction. On the PW side, Wimborne Junction to Corfe Mullen Junction originally formed one maintenance section, later coupled with Broadstone to Corfe Mullen Junction for economy.

The S&D’s Wimborne loop developed little after the 1885 cut-off, although traffic might have warranted doubling had the cut-off never been built. As it was, doubling of the cut-off never happened either, despite 1925 plans for it. Carters (or Corfe Mullen) Siding was the only intermediate facility, a late addition in 1903. Sandwiched between the loop and the cut-off was a substantial clay pit owned by Messrs. Carter, supplying raw clay for Poole Potteries near Hamworthy. Production was enough to warrant two trains per day of up to five wagons – the capacity of the siding. Alongside the siding were a slatted timber shed and a transhipment platform in the open. The pit operated a Decauville-type (portable) tramway running to the siding across



Carter’s Siding, looking SW towards Corfe Mullen Junction, 1965. Note the siding passing through the gate alongside the transhipment shed and loading dock. Birch saplings indicate the lack of use since 1959. The warning board (centre left) was the one the author removed in Summer 1965. Colin Caddy

Candys Lane; as the pit extended, track sections could be moved.

Wimborne loco depot

The main development on the loop between 1885 and the passenger closure in 1920 was at Wimborne loco depot. The need for a replacement (third) loco shed in the early 1900s is debatable; it can’t be explained in terms of the (declining) needs of S&D traffic alone and must have had some L&SWR impetus behind it (the L&SWR being a full partner in S&D operations from 1876). The S&D loco superintendent, Alfred Whitaker, nevertheless decided that the S&D footplate staff needed overnight accommodation at Wimborne and the shed needed rebuilding. I infer that the L&SWR took up much of the depot capacity while Wimborne continued to be an important interchange and train formation point, but I await firm evidence.

By 1920, a survey aimed at securing economies recorded the depot as having the lowest average maintenance costs among L&SWR depots – ironic, given that the Wimborne loop was considered an unnecessary financial burden by then? But closure was imminent and both Branksome and Bournemouth sheds were capable of taking up Wimborne’s work, Bournemouth’s having been relocated and enlarged.

An S&D train crew hostel was opened

in 1902 beside Oakley Lane at Wimborne Junction, opposite the Willett Arms inn and accessed from the shed by a footpath. Again, this curiously post-dates the cut-off and the reduced role of the Wimborne loop by some 17 years. The hostel could sleep 12 staff and the facilities are described in detail in Bill Coomer’s book and Colin Maggs’ *Life on the Somerset & Dorset* (reviewed in *T31*). It comprised several buildings, including the main rest house, steward’s cottage, and laundry, and the grounds extended down to the railway.

For the shed itself, a March 1901 plan shows a new, 10,000-gallon water tower with a ground floor office for the loco foreman, north west of the second shed. In 1909, the two earlier loco sheds were demolished and replaced by a new two-road, timber-built, double-pitched one, 100 feet long. A plan shows it to be built on a slightly larger footprint than the earlier two-road shed, using the original pits and providing cover for five locos. Lean-to accommodation included an office, stores, sand-drying furnace, mess room and earth closets. Sand and coal staithes already existed alongside the shed roads to the north.

The first shed next to Canford Siding had pits both inside and north of the turntable, which may or may not have been used after this shed was demolished. It also had separate ancillary buildings alongside, including a mess room and another water tower. One plan also shows a lineside structure north of the turntable; this may have been a platform. Other facilities included a borehole, water column and sheer legs on the pit road for repairs such as changing wheels and big end bearings; ▶

“Round-the-clock working on the eastern edge of this small town takes some imagining now.”

Looking for Wimborne S&D



Johnson 0-4-4 tank and Bath train come off the Wimborne loop under Bridge 223 east of Corfe Mullen Junction, circa 1910. The Junction here was created in 1905, before that the two bi-directional single lines connected east of Bailey Gate Station.

Dr Tice F Budden, Ref: LGRP 19560 Courtesy Keith Barrett Collection

washing out was also done.

Full details of S&D or L&SW loco allocations during the depot's life are not yet known, but Brian Jackson's *Castleman's Corkscrew* book and Milton & Bradley's S&D loco history record some. From 1860 to 1863, the L&SWR provided 2-2-2WT No.15 *Mars* and 2-4-0 No. 41 *Ajax* for the basic DCR services to Blandford. After the S&DR took over, England 2-4-0s Nos. 17 and 18 hauled Wimborne services from 1865 and were latterly shedded at Wimborne until withdrawal in 1897, one somewhat inappropriately used as the Blandford shunter. Johnson 0-4-4 tanks were mainstays of long-distance services into the 1900s and would have been on Wimborne shed regularly.

Fowler 0-6-0s were evident from 1874 and Vulcan 0-6-0s from the mid-1880s, mainly for goods duties. Johnson small 4-4-0s were seen on through services and on Wimborne shed from the early 1890s. Most of the pre-1900 classes appear in contemporary train photos used in this series. Over the depot's life, up to 12 L&SWR locos were based at the S&D shed at one time, obviously not all under cover. If all 12 had been on site at one time, together with S&D locos, the depot's track capacity would have been far exceeded!

Ups and Downs

Railway configuration around Wimborne affected the designation of either track direction or trains as 'Up' or 'Down', especially on the S&D. As first-comers, Brockenhurst-Wimborne-Hamworthy and presumably Wimborne-Blandford initially were designated Down (from

London). Later S&D running powers over L&SWR metals then muddled the situation. Through trains off the S&D from Burnham/Bath were designated Down, at least as far as Wimborne Junction, but arrived at Wimborne Station facing the Up (L&SW) direction. Up S&D trains reversing or starting at Wimborne would thus be facing the (L&SWR) Down direction until gaining the S&D at Wimborne Junction.

As late as 1931, "Instructions to Staff" in the S&D WTT stated in bold text: "The Line over the Southern Co's system as between Wimborne or Broadstone and Bournemouth West must be understood to be the "Up Line" and the Line between Bournemouth West and Broadstone or Wimborne must be understood to be the 'Down Line.' All concerned to note." So there! And it gets worse.

Wimborne became a directional changeover point for certain Up and Down trains. Down trains could arrive from three directions – from the S&D onto the Up line at the Junction, from West Moors, and after 1888 from Bournemouth, if running through from the Southampton direction. Wimborne could thus have Down trains from Eastleigh or Southampton arriving facing opposite directions, depending on whether they used the Old Road or the Bournemouth Direct line via Sway. Such confusion was not unique in British railway geography, but Wimborne was a particularly amusing case.

World War One

Returning to the chronology of the S&D loop, 1914-18 was a watershed, after which decline really set in. It continued

to carry considerable goods traffic and a basic local passenger service through the Edwardian era and World War One saw a temporary if substantial surge, although hard evidence is elusive.

The loop was used strategically to enable munitions, troops, coal and other supplies to reach Southampton over the S&D from the north, avoiding Poole and Bournemouth and without needing to go via great centres like Bristol and London. Ambulance trains and empty stock undoubtedly travelled in the opposite direction over the loop, avoiding reversal at Broadstone. The M&SWJR (Cheltenham-Andover) and DN&SR (Didcot-Winchester) served the same strategic purpose as the S&D. This wartime through working raises an intriguing prospect of S&D locos reaching Southampton, but I have only seen evidence of an occasional working as far east as Ringwood.

Regarding local services, it is known that during and just after the war, a light engine would be sent from Wimborne shed to Blandford to shunt the yard and work the military branch to Blandford Camp and the little-known military sidings at Milldown. One token local daily passenger service operated each way over the loop in wartime and remained the case as peacetime returned. Wartime depredations and the onset of the 1920s economic depression marked a threshold from which recovery was never likely.

Long time dying

In Part 1, I noted that the loop's decline was progressive from 1885 onwards, yet it would take all of 74 years for the final revenue-earning services on the remaining stub to cease (in 1959), six more before all use ceased (1965) and another three before final track-lifting (1968), not four or five years as I stated then. Along the way there were significant milestones of decline.

Post-1918, there was cause for reflection while slow national recovery got underway. With the transition from government control of railways towards the Big Four grouping in 1923, a culture of economising prevailed where services could not be justified. Road traffic had come into its own in the war and was taking an increasing toll on traditional railway business. The outgoing L&SWR and MR authorities conducted financial assessments and the S&D came under scrutiny by the Redhead Commission. The Wimborne loop was already a vulnerable target and became the earliest significant passenger closure on the

S&D. The alternative of southbound S&D passengers having to change at Broadstone to reach Wimborne was not considered a hardship, and closure (or rather withdrawal of the sole remaining train) came on July 11th 1920).

The Joint Committee's subsequent *Working Time Book* (i.e. working timetable or WTT) from October 4th 1920 paints an intriguing and contradictory picture of the declining S&D services at Wimborne. Although this was three months after official passenger closure, in the Down direction stopping locals are still shown from Templecombe, a Sunday passenger and milk train from Blandford, and even a 'Cook's excursion' from Birmingham to Bournemouth via Wimborne, together with a range of through goods from Bath or Templecombe to Wimborne, including mail, plus light engine and empty stock movements. The WTT included instructions for turning and taking water at Wimborne Junction, and references for wagons travelling east of Wimborne. Whether these residual passenger services actually ran or were a timetabling aberration is a mystery!

In the Up direction, there were broadly corresponding services to the Down ones (although fewer), but also some curiosities. The first movement of the day was a shunting engine sent from Wimborne Station (not loco shed) to Blandford. This would also shunt at Bailey Gate, when necessary, and Shillingstone, before returning to Blandford. This suggests that Wimborne depot was still supplying locos for local S&D services at this end of the line (no timings being shown from Bournemouth or Branksome to indicate that either of those sheds might be the source). There was also a light engine movement off Wimborne Junction to



The stub of the Wimborne loop at Digger's Bridge, looking NE, Summer 1965. Carter's Siding was on the right in the distance. Wagon storage had apparently ceased at this time. Note the A31 Dorchester road to the left. Peter Russell

Templecombe; that this run did not start from Wimborne Station would seem to confirm it had come straight off Wimborne depot – but why was it needed at Templecombe? An interesting relic of Wimborne's S&D operations in the WTT is that S&D mileages in the Up (Bath) direction are still shown as starting from 0 at Wimborne, rather than from Broadstone.

Through goods services over the loop continued until June 17th 1933, albeit with some prior retraction. London milk traffic from Bailey Gate was rerouted via Templecombe after February 28th 1932 (later via Broadstone from 1966-69), although strangely, by the time the WTT was issued from September 14th 1931, Carter's Siding appeared to provide the loop's only revenue-earning traffic. The 1920 passenger closure had been the main trigger for the authorities to start planning a rationalisation not only of the loop but also services and infrastructure at Wimborne itself. Major track and signalling changes were implemented during the early 1930s.

Rationalisation

Amid this economising came a late flush of proposals for new railways, deviations and upgradings in the UK, albeit that many failed to materialise. Among these was the Corfe Mullen-Broadstone doubling. Plans from November 1925 reveal both this and ideas for working the remaining goods traffic generated by Carter's Siding. Total closure of the loop had clearly been an option, but the SR seemed convinced by Carter's claims in October 1922 that their business would



The Wimborne loop (left) and Broadstone line (right) diverging, viewed eastwards from Br. 223, circa 1930s. Note PW gang, fog hut and excellent state of both lines. Ref: L&GRP 6432. Courtesy Keith Barrett Collection

suffer. Initially, the L&SWR proposed working this traffic (usually two full trains out and empties returned daily) from the Wimborne end. The plans also proposed removing the L&SWR Junction signalbox, the Junction connection in the L&SWR Down Main, the engine shed and water tower and the S&D signalbox, and installation of a new catch siding and ground frame between the S&D maintenance boundary and Lady Wimborne's Bridge (L&SWR Bridge 77). The S&D Down line was to be extended westwards from Wimborne Single Line Junction under Oakley Road Bridge for a short distance alongside the S&D Up line on trackbed never before used, to form a refuge siding for 50 wagons. This part and the catch siding were never implemented.

The remaining line from Wimborne Junction was to be cut at 61m. 13 ch., alongside the buffers of Carter's Siding. This scheme seems odd, as it would have involved a longer running line, greater maintenance, and retention of Lake Crossing (albeit unstaffed and operated by train staff). In the event, a much shorter running line was retained from Corfe Mullen Junction to the end of a headshunt at 61 m. 21 ch. This allowed wagons to be shunted in and out of the siding, the feeder point for which trailed towards Wimborne. This was to continue for 26 years until September 19th 1959, although actual rail-born clay traffic ceased earlier. How empties could be brought in and full wagons taken out without a loop on the running line is a mystery, unless empty and full trains were worked as separate trips.

Closure milestones came frequently after 1920. The hostel closed on December 1st 1922, only 20 years after opening. The S&D shed ceased railway use on January 21st 1923, remaining staff mostly being transferred to Templecombe shed. Lake Crossing was reduced to traincrew-operated status from June 6th 1925, having been unmanned after June 1st 1925. The S&D's Wimborne Single Line signalbox didn't actually close until April 1st 1928. On a more positive note, the 1920s saw not only retraction in the area, as Corfe Mullen Halt opened on the cut-off on July 5th 1928.

The main rationalisation accelerated as the 1930s started, with Wimborne Station and Junction getting most attention. The ground signals controlling Carter's Siding were removed on October 21st 1930, a single point lever sufficing thereafter. The S&D turntable was last used on July 6th 1931 and officially taken out of use by September 6th 1931, although the deck was not removed until June 18th 1933, the day

Looking for Wimborne S&D

after closure of the S&D loop to through goods. The 1925 plans suggest that Canford Siding may subsequently have been realigned slightly to ease a sharp bend around the turntable (surely an unnecessary expense?). 1933 was the big year of change, with the westernmost (left-handed) of the two crossovers at Corfe Mullen Junction being removed and, with through goods over the loop becoming history from June, Wimborne Junction was effectively abolished. Only Canford Siding and a short section of the S&D Up running line were left in situ.

Wimborne Junction signalbox closed on June 17th 1933 with the end of through S&D goods traffic and the junction signalling was simplified, the remaining sidings controlled subsequently by two electrical release levers in Wimborne Station signalbox. Chris Osment's researches on S&D signalling suggest that one intention was to use power operation of the siding points. As late as 1930, two LMS poster boards remained in situ on the south end of the Down buildings at Wimborne Station, facing the former S&D bay, even though no S&D passenger trains would have left this bay since at least July 1920!

The ground frame and trap point at Carter's Siding were also removed on June 17th 1933. It is not known exactly when the track between the Carter's Siding headshunt and Wimborne Junction was lifted; although track-lifting was not so urgent then, it's fair to assume the rails were gone by World War Two for the war effort. North of Wimborne Station, the gasworks siding was taken out of use on March 10th 1936; it seems likely that this had previously

received coal supplies over the S&D. At Wimborne Station, the former S&D (Down) bay was converted to a Down siding from April 10th 1938.

The 1925 plans indicate that the S&D shed would be removed soon after final closure of the loop, only 16 years after its rebuilding. The photo included here, dated 1931, shows shed and S&D running lines apparently in good order. Anecdotal sources suggest it survived until about 1953-54, but plans for a new gas main in Oakley Road Bridge, dated November 15th 1935, shows no shed, only Canford Siding, the truncated running line and the staff housing. Photo evidence from 1937 confirms clearance of the shed and all associated buildings by then. Only the nearby hostel and staff cottages survived, possibly still used by SR staff; it's not known when they passed into non-railway ownership. Coal handling at Canford Siding by local merchants may have spread over the depot site from the 1930s. I recall visiting the site in 1965, when Messrs. Burts occupied it, and being told that the turntable well was exposed whenever the coal stack was depleted.

No evidence has yet emerged of any thought being given to reopening the Wimborne loop in World War Two, given its potential strategic role comparable to that in World War One. The fact that two nearby military lines – to Blandford and Bovington Camps – were never reopened suggests such expenditure was considered unjustified in the face of greater road competition. However, there was a brief boost to rail traffic at Canford Siding, when the 52nd Pioneer Corps was encamped at nearby Merley

Park and scrap metal was loaded and despatched. Referred to by staff as "the old military sidings at Merley", these were served by two daily goods pick-up trains – 8.30 a.m. off Poole and 2.00 p.m. off Hamworthy Junction.

Terminal decline

The 1950s saw more small-scale retraction. BR took Canford Siding and the S&D stub at the former junction out of use on September 13th 1953, the mid-1950s date of removal being unclear. At Wimborne Station, the former S&D Down bay was disconnected from the Down Main on December 13th 1953 and reconnected via the yard. It was shortened slightly on August 9th 1963 after stock crashed through the stops, damaging the end wall of the Down-side buildings. This was not quite the final ignominious end of the former S&D bay, the remainder not being removed until March 1968, at least 48 years after S&D passenger trains last used it. Carter's Siding closed on September 19th 1959, with the useable running line cut back to 61m. 10ch. between the siding and Digger's Bridge. Lake Crossing Cottage, unoccupied since 1956, was demolished around 1960.

The line between Carter's and Corfe Mullen Junction was used for occasional wagon storage until about 1965, though no details of train movements are known. Carter's transshipment shed and dock were still in situ then. This limbo state is how I remember the spur when I first visited it with a friend from Wimborne school in Summer 1965, when no wagons occupied the running line – a quiet and hidden existence that belied the loop's one-time importance to the S&D.

I recall that the siding point displayed chairs from several pre-grouping companies, including LNWR and Isle of Wight Central. I guess these were cascaded down from track renewals on the LMS and SR systems, but only basic running repairs would probably have been carried out here from 1933 onwards. The gate into the siding was protected by a red wooden notice board with white lettering reading "Engines Must Not Pass This Notice" (visible in Colin Caddy's photo). We 'relieved' the site of this notice for 'posterity', hiding it for later collection, but to this day I don't know what happened to it subsequently!

The gated siding, point, lever and headshunt were left in situ, mouldering away in encroaching undergrowth until the spur from the junction was lifted by Summer 1968, ahead of the Blandford-Broadstone line being lifted in 1969-70.



Mixed goods train on the Down line at Wimborne Station, circa 1930. The S&D bay was to the right of the wagons. Two fascinating features are the LMS notice boards (still in place at least ten years after the last S&D passenger train!) and the rear canopy right of the Down-side buildings, which may have offered cover to parcels traffic using the 'back road' that is believed not to have been used by passenger trains. *Courtesy Paul Bolger, Stations UK*

The Life and Death of Wimborne S&D Shed

Locomotive profiles were commoner images than views of the shed buildings and other facilities during the depot's working life from 1860 to 1923. Here we present four known pictures of locos in the yard and two post-demolition views of the shed site.



The earliest known photo taken at the depot, circa 1880s, looking east. George England 2-4-0 No.17, in original condition, stands on the turntable road, the two shed roads in the foreground and LSW lines behind the loco. *B Matthews Collection M356/4. Courtesy Russ Garner*



Fowler 0-6-0 No.23 on the turntable, circa 1900, with the shed roads and coal stack in the foreground. The second shed casts a shadow to the right. The background trees are in Canford Park, on which estate the railway was developed. *J Pottle. Courtesy SDRT Collection*



Fowler 0-6-0 No. 19, with Stirling-type cab, stands with the loco on the turntable and the tender off, in 1904. Note the yard lamp next to the shed roads. *J Dyett. Courtesy Robin Atthill Collection*



Johnson small 4-4-0 No.68 stands on one of the roads north of the second shed, circa 1900. If only the loco buffered up to it was also photographed! In the left background are the LSW lines; in the right background is Cruxton Farm on Oakley Lane. *C H Eden. Courtesy Keith Barrett Collection*



Two rare views of the third shed after demolition. The left-hand one shows the shed base looking north towards the Junction in 1937, with the S&D trackbed on the left and the LSW lines beyond the bank on the right. *WA Camwell* The right-hand view (taken from a Bournemouth-Salisbury train, July 19th 1937) looks south west across Canford Siding and the turntable well to the shed remains. The approach track is middle left and the hostel roof is centre background. *H C Casserley. Courtesy Richard Casserley. Ref: I4397*



Corfe Mullen Junction signalbox closed on May 7th 1968, the gates being operated subsequently by hand by train staff. In the late-1960s, the trackbed was still distinct over the Wimborne loop's whole length, with bridges intact, even though nature had been reclaiming the Wimborne end since the 1930s.

So that was the end of the S&D's Wimborne loop apart from the disposal and re-use of the land. However, the short section of the former L&SWR line between Wimborne Junction and Wimborne Station, over which the S&D

had used running powers, continued in use between closure to passengers from May 4th 1964 and the removal of the last goods wagons on May 2nd 1977. I shall deal with all aspects of this aftermath in Part 3.

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Additional colour photos may be found on page 43 (inside back cover)

PART 3: Abandonment, redevelopment and survival. **Peter Russell** concludes the story of this short, long-lost route.

In Part 2, I took the story of the S&D's Wimborne loop to the point where final traffic at the Corfe Mullen end ceased in 1965 and track-lifting occurred in 1968. I noted that the short section of the ex-L&SWR 'Old Road' between Wimborne Junction and Wimborne Station, over which the S&D once had running powers, was to remain in use for miscellaneous traffic until Monday May 2nd 1977, when the last vehicles were removed. Part 3 covers abandonment and/or reuse of all sections of trackbed along the loop and into Wimborne Station, bringing the story up to date. It inevitably has a depressing conclusion for railway supporters, not to mention long-suffering travellers in today's congested Bournemouth-Poole conurbation, who would surely welcome a rail-based option.

The keys to the fortunes of the remains of the S&D's Wimborne loop since the 1960s are road traffic growth, especially pressures for an A31 Wimborne Bypass, together with associated development pressures in an area where every 'spare' land parcel has building potential. My findings are inevitably political, since events can only be fully explained in terms of one



West of the site of Wimborne Junction, where SR Central and S&DJ maintenance met. On April 25th 1964, just seven days before the end of passenger services at Wimborne Station, station porter, Roger Bunting, and the photographer's daughter, Rosalind, frame the concrete boundary sign, long since an administrative irrelevance by that time.

Brian Kohring, courtesy Graham Kelsey

set of interests (private road transport, developers) exerting dominance over others (rail, environment).

Abandonment

The earliest abandonment on the S&D's Wimborne loop had been between Carter's Siding headshunt and Wimborne Junction. The stub to Carter's from Corfe Mullen Junction remained after closure of the loop in 1933, as did a short section of the S&D Down line at Wimborne Junction, together with Canford Siding. The remainder was lifted during the 1930s, but I have yet to discover when trackbed parcels were disposed of and to whom. I suspect that the Southern Railway/Region held onto the land for some years, gradually relinquishing it as opportunities arose.

At Wimborne Junction, the S&D stub and Canford Siding had been taken out of use on September 13th 1953, the removal date being unknown. However, oral evidence from a current, elderly resident of Oakley Road indicates that cattle were loaded onto railway trucks there as late as 1957, probably from the adjoining Cruxton Farm on the Canford ▶



River Stour Bridge at Wimborne, looking south, Spring 1967, with a BR 76XXX 2-6-0 shunting the yard. S&D trains ran over this bridge from Wimborne Junction to the station, between 1860 and 1933. The state of the bridge was used as a reason for final closure of the remaining line from Poole in 1977. *Peter Russell*

Looking for Wimborne S&D

Park estate. That apart, the former S&D loco depot site and the S&D trackbed ceased railway use and became derelict, except for the area around the former turntable – used for coal storage and distribution (by road) until at least the late 1960s. Subsequently, the depot site was occupied by gypsy caravans as late as 1977, when the final trains ran into Wimborne Station. It is not yet known when the former S&D staff houses and hostel passed into non-railway residential use. The shed and junction sites were to be largely obliterated by the bypass construction in 1980, dealt with later.

Next for abandonment along the loop was the stub to Carter's Siding, all track remaining in situ until the late 1960s. Initially, this was believed removed in 1969-70 together with the Blandford-Broadstone line, but S&D author Robin Athill recorded removal by Summer 1968 in his survey of the state of the S&D in the (then) S&DR Circle Bulletin.

Land disposal/re-use

Pressures on land in general and 'surplus' railway land in particular gathered real pace in the post-war boom. In the mid-1960s, the whole S&D loop was still distinct, with bridges intact, even though nature and farming had been reclaiming the Wimborne end. I revisited Carter's Siding in 1969 and 1973/74 to find vegetation encroaching, little sign of the siding, platform or clay transhipment shed. From here to Corfe Mullen Junction, the trackbed and earthworks had become overgrown, gradually reverting to woodland in places.

Given the mainly rural position of the loop, there were few pressures for disposal and re-use. Some sections



Corfe Mullen Junction, looking west from Bridge 223, May 1968. The grassy stub of the S&D's Wimborne loop to Carter's Siding awaits lifting; it was gone by Summer 1968, the Blandford-Broadstone line alongside being removed in 1969-70. Note the catch siding off the Wimborne loop, which ended in a sand drag. *Peter Russell*

passed to adjoining farms to be absorbed into fields or used for access. This seems the case from Oakley westwards past Merley Hall and Lake Farms as far as Lake Crossing. Where earthworks were insubstantial, the trackbed would soon merge with surrounding fields unless lineside fencing was maintained. Awkward occupation crossings would be opened out for ease of access between fields. Only one accommodation under-bridge existed on this section – Bridge 227 at Merley, removed during the Wimborne Bypass construction.

The deep Oakley Hill Cutting west of Wimborne Junction slipped into slumber, becoming overgrown and waterlogged for nearly half a century, until opened out in 1980 for the bypass. East of Merley Hall, a short section gradually merged into woodland adjoining the River Stour. Dorset County Council acquired some land hereabouts in association with the

bypass, including Merley Hall and parts of the S&D trackbed.

West of Lake Crossing, close proximity to the modern Dorchester road left the line more vulnerable to encroachment and redevelopment. The old Dorchester road over the crossing was widened after railway closure and realigned to meet the new Lake Gates roundabout when the bypass was built. The site of the crossing house – demolished around 1960 – disappeared under the new roadworks. Immediately west of Lake Gates, a short section of trackbed survives in 2009 as a narrow pasture field. Beyond that, the trackbed was parcelled up for re-use from the 1950s onwards.

A sewage works for Corfe Mullen was developed east of the trackbed, accessed via an old occupation crossing. A roadside café developed, becoming a Little Chef, with a petrol station immediately to its south west. Behind the parking area, the trackbed is still visible on a slight embankment, now part of a large camping and caravan site that extends across the site of Carter's Siding and the transhipment shed. After clay working ceased, the pit area east of Candys Lane became a scrap and haulage yard, which today is very active with large lorries accessing it from the A31 – no doubt the main reason for the removal of the arch and east abutment wall of Digger's Bridge in the 1970s (the west wall survives).

Wimborne terminated

After closure of the Old Road to passengers on and from Monday May 4th 1964 (last trains May 2nd), general goods continued as far east as Ringwood until 1967 and oil traffic to West Moors MoD until 1974. In the early 1970s, Wimborne yard held coaches from BR's exhibition train (Trainex), undergoing refurbishment and fitting out (they subsequently moved to Salisbury).

The Old Road was cut back to just north of Wimborne Station, eliminating the restricted 'Leigh Arch' (LSWR Bridge 75) on the A31 and leaving the station at the end of a spur from Holes Bay Junction at Poole. Though few realised it, remnants of the S&D presence therefore lingered at Wimborne Station, and at the former Wimborne Junction and Broadstone. The remaining ex-L&SWR single track between Wimborne Junction and Wimborne Station was slewed just south of the Stour Viaduct. The days of even this remnant were numbered.

On Sunday May 1st 1977, the Lea Valley Railway Club staged The Corkscrew Shuttle which saw Crompton



Corfe Mullen Junction signalbox and level crossing, looking east, August 17th 1970. The weeds were taking over, 20 months after final closure to Blandford freight and just before track-lifting reached this point from Blandford. *A G Thorne, courtesy Graham Kelsey*



The site of Wimborne Junction, looking south, May 1st 1977, with the former S&D trackbed veering off right and the singled ex-LSWR line to Broadstone to the left. Note the traveller's caravan on the site of the loco depot. Compare this view with the 1913 picture on p.34 of T32. Chris Francombe, courtesy Graham Kelsey



Crompton diesel No. 33 107 fronts the 'Corkscrew Shuttle', facing Broadstone at the south end of Wimborne Station, May 1st 1977. A number of push-pull trips were run for enthusiasts before the line closed for good with effect from the next day. Former S&D fireman (now S&DRHT volunteer), Aubrey Punter, was in the cab! Peter Russell

diesel No. 33 107 with Bournemouth-line 4TC electric sets Nos. 409 + 413 undertake three return runs from Bournemouth to Wimborne for enthusiasts, trips I had the pleasure of experiencing and photographing. The shuttle consist seemed to echo the M7-hauled push-pull trains (SR called them pull-push) that held sway on local services on the Old Road until 1964.

Perhaps the supreme twist to this end-story was that legendary S&D footplateman, Aubrey Punter, who fired the last Pines Express in 1962 and was still working for BR out of Bournemouth, was secondman (and unofficial driver!) on No. 33 107. After all his through trips between Bath and Bournemouth, Aubrey was finally able to perform a reversal at Wimborne, something S&D trains had not done for more than half a century!

There is no doubt that the Ministry of

“The deep Oakley Hill Cutting west of Wimborne Junction slipped into slumber, becoming overgrown.”

Transport and Dorset County Council had been planning a Wimborne bypass for years, so the A31 trunk road could escape the tight confines of the town centre. A glance at local maps is enough to show only one realistic route corridor – close to the Stour south of the town, inevitably severing the Old Road at the Junction and closely following the S&D to Lake Gates. I foresaw that in 1968, when I drew up a bypass plan to present at my planning school interview in May. (The shame of putting up such a pro-road scheme has remained with me since!). Taking the new road either under or

over the remaining railway at the site of Wimborne Junction was problematic, owing to difficult levels; anyway, why would the authorities bother, when it was easier to close the railway?

Wimborne bypassed

It doesn't need a conspiracy theory to see that the authorities (including BR) could undermine any case for retaining the railway or even just the trackbed for a future local rail network. A similar fate befell the S&D's Broadstone-Blandford stub, where anticipated bypasses for Blandford and Spetisbury/Charlton Marshall would need to sever or follow the S&D, and a major new over-bridge would have been needed to replace Bailey Gate Level Crossing on the A31, had the line survived.

The Broadstone-Holes Bay trackbed was also destined to become the Broadstone Way link road into Poole. These were the days when County Surveyors and road engineers held sway and railways were destroyed with little thought for their potential transport role in the planning of urban and regional development. In the end, a convenient scapegoat for total closure was the supposed poor condition of the Stour Viaduct at Wimborne, although considerable doubt was expressed about the truth of this and repairs would surely have been relatively inexpensive.

Campaigns

There was nevertheless a desperate rearguard action at the eleventh hour. Local campaigners (fronted by a young Colin Divall, now Professor of Railway Studies at York University) pressed for consideration of a rapid transit network based on the rail routes, together with route safeguarding in the meantime.

Colin's letter to local newspapers in early 1974 proposed use of the Poole-Wimborne-West Moors-Verwood route, as this corridor was experiencing rapid development, and becoming part of one of the fastest-growing conurbations in Europe. Others were pressing the case for reopening Broadstone-Blandford. Andrew Goltz, then leading the embryonic Swanage Railway Society, picked up the Wimborne scheme as a back-up should the Swanage project fail, and the East Dorset Rapid Transit Group (EDRTG) emerged from this collaboration.

Looking for Wimborne S&D



The remaining (west) wall of Digger's Bridge, looking SE, April 10th 2008. This bridge once carried the S&D's Wimborne loop over Candy's Lane between Corfe Mullen Junction and Carter's Siding (off left). The cut-off to Broadstone ran on the skyline among the trees in the background, Goodchild's Bridge being on a direct line from the camera through the entry from the A31 (foreground). *Peter Russell*

Pressure on Dorset County Council led to a promise by them to buy the route. With this notable gain secured, EDRTG largely faded away, but the land purchase later fell victim to spending cuts and the route was sold off by BR, with the inevitable obstructive development occurring as the best sites were cherry-picked by developers (with the natural encouragement of BR Property Board). Only later were the remaining trackbed sections stitched together to form the Castleman Trailway (shared-use path), but even that needed some tortuous diversions to secure its continuity.

Another campaigning front had opened in the mid-1970s when it was known that the Poole-Wimborne stub would be closed, but this time as a preservation project, albeit with a nod towards associated public transport use. Even 'Save Wimborne Station' stickers were distributed, but BR was unco-operative, local authority support virtually non-existent, and the die was cast. Independently of this initiative, Tony Ward (now with the Shillingstone Station Project) and I both appealed in separate letters to the Somerset & Dorset Railway Museum Trust *Bulletin* in 1975, to

1960s. Local railway enthusiast and local S&DRT group organiser, Brian Kohring, captured some photos of the land-shaping in 1980, when diggers opened out most of the overgrown S&D shed site and both the S&D and L&SWR lines at the junction. This exposed S&D Bridge 230 at Oakley Road for the last time before its demolition and replacement with a modern concrete structure slightly to the south.

Oakley Hill Cutting west of the Poole Road was infilled and later annexed to adjoining gardens on the Merley Way estate. Willetts Road, which ran closely parallel to the S&D between Oakley and Lake Gates was blocked off at the Oakley end and reduced in highway status to a bridleway, albeit with lengths of slowly-decaying tarmac and encroaching vegetation, creating the unusual spectacle of a disused road alongside a disused railway! The bypass again breached the S&D east of Merley Hall before paralleling the trackbed closely to Lake Gates. All four roads approaching Lake Gates were realigned to meet a large new roundabout on the north side of the trackbed. As the bypass ended at Lake Gates, the S&D west of there was unaffected by roadworks.

Remnants

I've looked for parts of the S&D's Wimborne loop on several occasions, but only recently made a thorough survey of the remnants. Mostly, it's a depressing exercise, typical of railway archaeology on long-lost lines, but surprisingly there are still some points of interest and a few



Looking east from Bridge 223 at Corfe Mullen Junction, May 1977, with the trackbeds of the Wimborne loop (left) and cut-off to Broadstone (right) still distinct nearly seven years after track-lifting was completed. Compare this picture with the 1930s view on p.27 of T33. *Peter Russell*

"...it's truly hard to imagine through trains between Bath and Bournemouth passing this way."

consider leasing Wimborne Station as a relocation option when it was known that the Trust would have to vacate Radstock North. Such campaigns were perhaps naïve and inevitably up against the powers-that-be, and the late 1970s saw the remaining track to Wimborne lifted.

Highway robbery

The fact that construction started on Wimborne Bypass by 1980, less than three years after the railway ceased operation, hints at closed minds. The long lead-in times to road construction mean that early route alignments and designs would have been in place probably at least as far back as the

historic artefacts in situ. At Wimborne Junction, the embankment between the river and the junction survives, including the restored ornamental arch over Canford House Drive, known also as Lady Wimborne's Bridge (see T28 page 36). Prominent in the restoration group was S&DRHT member, Graham Kelsey from Broadstone. The base of the LSW Wimborne Junction signalbox can still be discerned among the rampant rhododendrons just south of the bridge. While no relics are evident through the former loco depot area, the hostel buildings survive in private residential use in a noisy corner between the bypass and the Poole road.

West of the Poole road, minor earthworks, a culvert and railway fencing can still be seen on the north side of the blocked-off Willetts Road – now a delightfully bucolic lane with no motor traffic, bar the odd tractor! Further west, farming changed the trackbed as recently as Summer 2008, with boundary fencing ripped out and fields on either side amalgamated by ploughing.

Nearby, the site of a footpath accommodation crossing over the S&D leading down to the Stour is marked by a gate and signpost, while immediately west among the trees is a low embankment, with bent iron rails and concrete posts still with wires intact some 77 years after final closure. Beyond this point, Willetts Road was diverted under the bypass to emerge on the south side of the S&D trackbed. From Merley Farm to Lake Gates, the bypass is virtually on the railway alignment or immediately north or south of it. There is little left to identify a dismantled railway here, except a short stretch of one side of embankment curving out slightly into the Stour floodplain.

Standing on Wimborne Road on the Corfe Mullen side of Lake Gates roundabout, the trackbed to the east has gone completely, but it can be discerned just west of the road where a culvert and railway fence posts survive. A short section of trackbed to the west, eventually passing behind the Little Chef car park, remains visible as far as the camping site. Around the late 1990s, a phone mast was erected on the trackbed where Candy's Lane converges with it and lorries from the former Carter's clay pit use hardstanding on part of the S&D trackbed beside the mast as a manoeuvring area.

From the mast through to Corfe Mullen Junction, the formation is quite evident, if overgrown, and mostly on embankment of varying height. From just west of Digger's Bridge (the south wall of which survives), a path was cleared in 2007 along the trackbed to form a trailway, opened in 2008 and part of National Cycle Network Route 25, although presently unsurfaced except at either end. The S&D's Wimborne cut-off also forms part of this land between Glen Lane's Bridge (Br. 224) and Corfe Mullen Junction, converging with the loop and gradually descending to the junction, with low retaining walls intact

on the south side and some metalwork such as a gradient post stem and pulley posts. Near to Bridge 223, where horses grazed in the 1990s, the trackbed is less overgrown. This whole section is secluded and delightful, except for the noise of traffic on the adjoining A31.

Corfe Mullen Junction Bridge remains in good condition, although the view of the trackbed from the road over it is obscured by tree growth. Still visible in the undergrowth beside St. Hubert's Church is a low retaining wall with iron railings that once supported a catch siding and sand drag to prevent any runaways from the Wimborne loop from fouling the 'main line'. A similar one facing the opposite direction once existed on the Down line west of the crossing, where an old wicket gate survives. At the crossing itself, the keeper's house has been extended by 100% on the Wimborne end, albeit designed sympathetically in the same vernacular as the original building. The remaining crossing gate is not the original, having been reconstructed by the cottage owner. Double-track S&D rails survive in the roadway underneath the tarmac, among the few pre-closure S&D rails remaining in situ (see Miscellany, page 40).

Epitaph and beyond

Standing at any point on the S&D's Wimborne loop nowadays, but especially around Merley, it's truly hard to imagine through trains between Bath and Bournemouth passing this way, before reversing at Wimborne, or even the residual milk traffic heading from Bailey Gate to London in the 1920s. I only wish I'd taken more photographs of the remains in the 1960s, particularly as they were within sight of my school, but hindsight's a frustrating thing.

I'm far from the end of the Wimborne railway story, indeed still at the start on some aspects, but I now know much more clearly where to look. I'm sure there is still plenty of fascinating material to unearth. Sadly, space limitations in this series prevented me from using track layouts for Wimborne Junction, Wimborne Station and Corfe Mullen Junction, which would have helped readers to follow the narrative more easily. Since I began researching this series, I have clarified many aspects, revealed a few errors or misinterpretations, and made new



The S&D's Wimborne loop trackbed, facing east from near Merley Hall towards Wimborne Junction, Spring 2008. The low, ivy-covered embankment in the foreground now ends abruptly at the former footpath accommodation crossing (centre), beyond which the route is ploughed out as far as the housing at Merley Way in the background. *James Horsley*

findings. It would be futile to round these up here, as I would simply extend the Wimborne series in this journal and start a never-ending cycle of revisions, so I'll keep them for the steadily emerging book! Next stop – Blandford.

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SAVE WIMBORNE STATION

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Campaign sticker from mid-1970s. G W Russell is no relation to Peter. *Courtesy Colin Divall*